A HISTORY OF ENGLISH POETRY

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BY

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ET

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COLLEGII NOVI IN OXONIA SOCIO,

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PREFACE

It is more than one hundred and fifty years since a great English poet conceived the design of writing the history of English Poetry. The following scheme, preserved by Ruffhead,[1] and doubtless communicated to him by Warburton, represents the outlines of the plan on which Pope would have proceeded, though it seems never to have advanced beyond the paper on which it was scribbled :—

Æra I

1. School of Provence.	Chaucer's *Visions, Romaunt of the Rose, Pierce Plowman*, Tales from Boccace. Gower.
2. School of Chaucer.	Lydgate. T. Occleve. Walt. de Mapes. Skelton.
3. School of Petrarch.	E. of Surrey. Sir Thomas Wyatt. Sir Philip Sidney. G. Gascoyn.
4. School of Dante.	Lord Buckhurst's *Induction*. *Gorboduc*. Original of Good Tragedy. Seneca, his model

Æra II

Spenser, Col. Clout, from the school of Ariosto and Petrarch, translated from Tasso.

5. School of Spenser.	W. Brown's *Pastorals*. Ph. Fletcher's *Purple Island*, *Alabaster*, *Piscatory Ec.* S. Daniel Sir Walter Raleigh. Milton's *Juvenilia* Heath, Habinton.

[1] *Life of Pope*, p. 425

Translations from Italian. { Golding. / Edm. Fairfax. / Harrington.

6. School of Donne. { Cowley, Davenant. / Michael Drayton. / Sir Thomas Overbury. / Randolph. / Sir John Davis. / Sir John Beaumont. / Cartwright. / Cleveland. / Crashaw. / Bishop Corbet. / Lord Falkland.

{ Carew, T. Carey } In matter; { G. Sandys in his *Par. of Job*, Fairfax } In versification } Models to Waller.

{ Sir John Mennis, Thos. Bagnal } Originals to Hudibras.

Pope's scheme came after his death into the hands of Gray, who was so much struck with it that he contemplated writing, in conjunction with Mason, a History of English Poetry on more or less similar lines. "Their design," says Mant in his *Life of Warton*, p. cxxvi., "was to introduce specimens of the Provençal poetry, and of the Scaldic, British, and Saxon, as preliminary to what first deserved to be called English poetry, about the time of Chaucer, from whence their history properly so called was to commence. Gray, however, was deterred by the magnitude of the undertaking, and being informed that Warton was employed on a similar design, more readily relinquished his own." The letter which he wrote to Warton on the occasion is as follows:—

PEMBROKE HALL, 15*th April* 1770.

Sir—Our friend Dr. Hurd having long ago desired me in your name to communicate any fragments or sketches of a design I once had to give a History of English Poetry, you may well think me rude

or negligent, when you see me hesitating for so many months before I comply with your request, and yet, believe me, few of your friends have been better pleased than I to find this subject (surely neither uninteresting nor unuseful) had fallen into hands so likely to do it justice: few have felt a higher esteem for your talents, your taste and industry; in truth, the only cause of my delay has been a sort of diffidence, that would not let me send you anything so short, so slight, and so imperfect, as the few materials I had begun to collect or the observations I had made on them. A sketch of the divisions and arrangement of the subject, however, I venture to transcribe, and would wish to know whether it corresponds in anything with your own plan, for I am told your first volume is already in the press.

Introduction.—On the poetry of the Gaelic (or Celtic) nations as far back as it can be traced.

On that of the Goths: its introduction into these islands by the Saxons and Danes, and its duration. On the origin of rhyme among the Franks, the Saxons, and the Provençaux, some account of the Latin rhyming poetry from its early origin down to the 15th century.

On the school of Provence, which rose about the year 1100, and was soon followed by the French and Italians: their heroic poetry or romances in verse, allegories, fabliaux, syrvientes, comedies, farces, canzoni, sonnets, balades, madrigals, sistines, etc. Of their imitators the French, and of the first Italian school (commonly called the Sicilian) about the year 1200, brought to perfection by Dante, Petrarch, Boccace, and others.

State of poetry in England from the Conquest (1066), or rather from Henry II.'s time (1154), to the reign of Edward III. (1327).

P. 2. On Chaucer, who first introduced the manner of the Provençaux, improved by the Italians, into our country; his characters and merits at large; the different kinds in which he excelled. Gower, Occleve, Lydgate, Hawes, G. Douglas, Lindsay, Bellenden, Dunbar, etc.

P. 3. Second Italian school (of Ariosto, Tasso, etc.), an improvement on the first, occasioned by the revival of letters in the end of the 15th century. The lyric poetry of this and the former age introduced from Italy by Lord Surrey, Sir T Wyatt, Bryan, Lord Vaux, etc., in the beginning of the 16th century.

Spenser, his character, subject of his poem, allegoric and romantic, of Provençal invention; but his manner of creating it borrowed from the second Italian school. Drayton, Fairfax, Phin. Fletcher, Golding, Phaer, etc. This school ends in Milton.

A third Italian school full of conceit, begun in Queen Elizabeth's time, continued under James and Charles I. by Donne, Crashaw, Cleveland, and ends perhaps in Sprat.

P. 4. School of France introduced after the Restoration. Waller, Dryden, Addison, Prior, and Pope, which has continued down to our own times.

You will observe that my idea was in some measure taken from a scribbled paper of Pope, of which (I believe) you have a copy. You will also see that I have excluded dramatic poetry entirely, which if you have taken in, it will at least double the bulk and labour of your book.

To this letter Warton replied :—

WINCHESTER, *20th April* 1770.

Sir—I am infinitely obliged to you for the favour of your letter. Your plan for the *History of English Poetry* is admirably constructed and much improved from an idea of Pope, which Mr. Mason obligingly sent me from our friend Dr. Hurd. I regret that a writer of your consummate taste should not have executed it.

Although I have not followed the plan, yet it is of great service to me, and throws much light on many of my periods by giving connected views and details. I begin with such an introduction or general dissertation as you had intended, viz. on the Northern Poetry, with its introduction into England by the Danes and Saxons, and its duration. I then begin my history at the Conquest, which I write chronologically in sections, and continue as matter successively offers itself, in a series of regular annals, down to and beyond the Restoration. I think with you that dramatic poetry is detached from the idea of my work, that it requires a separate consideration, and will swell the size of my book beyond all bounds. One of my sections, a very large one, is entirely on Chaucer, and will almost make my first volume, for I design two volumes in quarto. This first volume will soon be in the press. I should have said before that though I proceed chronologically, yet I often stand still to give some general view, as perhaps of a particular species of poetry, etc., and even anticipate sometimes for this purpose. These views often form one section, yet are interwoven with the tenor of the work, without interrupting my historical series. In this respect some of my sections have the effect of your parts or divisions.

I cannot take my leave without declaring that my strongest incitement to prosecute the *History of English Poetry* is the pleasing

hope of being approved by you, whose true genius I so justly venerate, and whose genuine poetry has ever given me such sincere pleasure.

Warton went some way in the execution of his design. His first volume was published in 1774; the second in 1778, by which time he must have seen clearly how impossible it would be for him to confine his history within the limits he had first intended. A third volume was produced in 1781, but afterwards his energy seems to have decayed, for on his death in 1790, his biographer says that "only a few of the sheets of vol. iv. were printed, and no part left in a state for printing." Joseph Warton talked of taking up his brother's task, but did nothing. In 1824 the *History of English Poetry* was republished under the editorship of Richard Price, who added an excellent Preface of his own on the "Origin of Romantic Fiction," and embodied in the work the notes of Ritson, Park, and other antiquaries. This edition was reprinted in 1840 with a few fresh notes by Thomas Wright and others. In 1871 it was again reprinted, with W. Carew Hazlitt as editor, two new dissertations being added to those which Warton had prefixed to his history,—one on the "Seven Sages," and the other on the "Lays of Marie of France"; so that Warton's work may be looked upon as a kind of classic fragment, the incompleteness of which has been emphasised by the glosses and alterations of three generations of commentators.

A monument of this kind furnishes an eloquent warning of the difficulties which await the historian of English Poetry. It was open to Warton to construct his history either on literary and technical, or on antiquarian, principles. Gray, it is plain, would have proceeded on the former lines, and every man must share Warton's regret that he made no attempt to bring his conception into being. His genius, his admirable taste, his correct

scholarship, his knowledge of Italian literature, would have made his interpretation of our older poetry of inestimable value, and though the proposed arrangement of his materials was in some respects arbitrary, experience would have shown him how to amend what was faulty in his design.

Had Warton chosen to follow the course contemplated by Pope and Gray, few men would have been better qualified to bring the undertaking to a successful issue. His reading was wide, his scholarship sound, his taste fine and discriminating; and though he had no pretensions to be called a great poet, his verse is at least marked by genuine poetic sensibility. Unfortunately he set about his work in the spirit of an antiquary, and in the patience, the industry, and the accuracy, required for this branch of knowledge, he was inferior to men who could not compare with him in capacity as a literary critic. His correspondence with Gray, and his method as shown in his *History*, equally declare that he had not formed any idea of the technical unity of his subject. He was aware that it was necessary for him to preserve at least some appearance of order in the arrangement of his materials, for he tells Gray that he "sometimes stands still to give a general view." But though he saw that the Origin of Romantic Fiction and the Introduction of Learning into England were both intimately associated with the History of Poetry, he did not treat them as if they were of its essence, but discussed them separately, incidentally, in a merely archæological temper, and with so little perception of their necessary relation to his subject, that he gave equal prominence to a "Dissertation" on the *Gesta Romanorum*. Moreover, by treating the history of poetry as if it meant a mere series of annals, he fell into the way of simply hunting up old metrical remains, without attempting to classify them by their poetic spirit and character.

If Gray, in the eighteenth century, could say with

justice that the study of the History of English Poetry was "neither unuseful nor uninteresting," his words have a yet wider meaning in our own time. Year by year the English language spreads itself farther over the earth's surface. Wherever it is spoken begins the great struggle for material prosperity which always accompanies the march of the Anglo-Saxon race. Free institutions spring up, and the very heat and fervour of democratic competition, the desire of writers to say some new thing or invent some new style, the ceaseless immigration of foreign sentiments, words, and idioms, all contribute to eat away the old standards of literary English. Unless, therefore, we keep before our eyes the true genius of the nation, as illustrated by writers who have embodied their thoughts in the most beautiful and enduring form, there is a grave danger that the language of England will yield to forces of the same kind as those which dissolved the structure of classical Latin. On the other hand, if, in the schools and universities which are multiplying through the British Empire, the study of our best classical authors be placed on a popular basis, it may become an instrument of the greatest value for the spread of knowledge and refinement.

While a writer of to-day who aims at filling this sensible void in our literature, may well accuse himself of presumption in approaching a task which men of genius have either shrunk from or failed to accomplish, he may at the same time derive encouragement from the thought that he enters on it with certain external advantages which were denied to his predecessors. Philology, Comparative Mythology, Archæology, have all thrown fresh light on the course of English Poetry. The labour of collecting materials has been infinitely lightened Where Warton had to grope after specimens of old English poetry among MSS. or folios in black-letter, hidden away in remote nooks and corners, the enterprise of the Percy Society, the

Chaucer Society, the Early English Text Society, has enabled the critic to form a generalised view of the character of our primitive literature. It is as easy as it is illiberal to sneer at the scholar who reproduces, with all the care bestowed upon a play of Æschylus, the text of *William of Palerne* or *Guy of Warwick*. But the thanks of all lovers of learning are due to the patient toil of those who, leaving the more flowery paths of literature, are content to illustrate the infant efforts of the English Muse for the sake of any one who may feel an interest in them. Nevertheless, while the multiplication of materials makes it easier for the historian to generalise his conception, the task of selection and arrangement becomes, in one sense, more difficult. I have been bold enough to abandon the plan of Warton, and to revert, with considerable modifications, to the plan of Gray. But as men's ideas of what is meant by the History of Poetry have been greatly confused by the manner in which the subject has been treated, I must ask the reader to let me explain what are my reasons for building on altogether new foundations, and what the principles are on which this history is constructed.

1. The experience of Warton points clearly to the conclusion that the history of English Poetry cannot be treated in a satisfactory manner unless the design of the historian possesses unity. Gray's design satisfied this condition up to a certain point, but it was open to the objection, that though he accurately noted the course of our poetry, and gave a just analysis of the general causes that produced it, the classification he adopted did not always correspond with the facts. The "schools" of which he speaks existed only in a metaphor borrowed from the art of painting, which suggests that the poets grouped under them were separated from each other by external differences more profound than was actually the case, and which, moreover, seems to exclude

from the development of the art the operation of all but technical influences. I have endeavoured to extend his conception. In this history I have looked for the unity of the subject precisely where the political historian looks for it, namely, in the life of the nation as a whole: my aim has been to treat poetry as an expression of the imagination, not simply of the individual poet, but of the English people; to use the facts of political and social history as keys to the poet's meaning, and to make poetry clothe with life and character the dry record of external facts.

2. If the course of our poetry is to be treated historically, it must exhibit the principle of its growth and movement. Movement in political history is measured by the achievements of arms and commerce; in constitutional history by changes in laws and institutions, by the spectacle of

> Freedom slowly broadening down
> From precedent to precedent;

in poetry, and the other arts of expression, it is mainfested by the simultaneous appearance in the nation of new modes of thought, fresh types of composition, improved methods of harmony. Mind works upon mind; the small beginnings of one generation are carried forward, if only a little way, in the next. Hence we cannot afford to despise the rude art of our forefathers; and it is much to be regretted that Warton, by simply collecting archaic materials without attempting to group and classify them, created a kind of distaste for the historic study of our early literature. See, for example, the effect his method has produced on a scholar like M. Taine.

"Must we," asks M. Taine, speaking of Chaucer's successors, "quote all these good people who speak without having anything to say? You may find them in Warton; dozens of translators, importing the poverties of French literature, and imitating imitations; rhyming chroniclers,

most commonplace of men, whom we only read because we must accept history from every quarter, even from imbeciles; spinners and spinsters of didactic poems, who pile up verses on the training of falcons, on heraldry, on chemistry; editors of moralities, who invent the same dreams over again for the hundredth time, and get themselves taught universal history by the goddess Sapience. Like the writers of the Latin decadence, these folk only think of copying, compiling, abridging, constructing in text-books, in rhymed memoranda, the encyclopædia of their times." [1]

Having thus dismissed the Middle Ages *en bloc*, M. Taine proceeds to consider the typical mediæval poet:—

"Listen to the most illustrious, the grave Gower—'morall Gower,' as he was called. He is like an old secretary of a Court of Love, André le Chapelain, or any other, who would pass the day in solemnly registering the sentences of ladies, and in the evening, partly asleep on his desk, would see in a half dream their sweet smiles and their beautiful eyes. The ingenious but exhausted vein of Charles of Orleans still flows in his French ballads. He has the same fondling delicacy almost a little affected. The poor little poetic spring flows yet in thin, transparent streamlets over the smooth pebbles, and murmurs with a babble pretty, but so low that at times you cannot hear it. But dull is the rest! His great poem, *Confessio Amantis*, is a dialogue between a lover and his confessor, imitated chiefly from Jean de Meung, having for object, like the *Roman de la Rose*, to explain and classify the impediments of love. The superannuated theme is always reappearing, covered by a crude erudition. You will find there an exposition of hermetic science, lectures on the philosophy of Aristotle, a treatise on politics, a litany of ancient and modern legends gleaned from the compilers, marred in

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the passage by the pedantry of the schools and the ignorance of the age. . . . Hawes copies the *House of Fame* by Chaucer, and a sort of allegorical amorous poem after the *Roman de la Rose*. . . . Barclay translates the *Mirror of Good Manners* and the *Ship of Fools*. Continually we meet with dull abstractions, used up and barren; it is the scholastic phase of poetry. If anywhere there is an accent of greater originality it is in Lydgate's *Dance of Death*, bitter buffooneries, sad gaieties, which in the hands of artists and poets were having their run throughout Europe."[1]

All this is very agreeable; some of it is very true. Yet it is questionable whether so much wit is quite appropriate in a humanist, whose motto ought to be *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*. "It remains for all of us to go where Numa and Ancus have arrived"; and it may be that the twenty-fifth century will find as little of interest in the nineteenth as M. Taine finds in the fourteenth century. But if the reader is to be taught to regard the poor English poets of the fourteenth century with such vast disdain, it would at least be well that the critic should allow him to descend in his balloon to an elevation at which objects can be separately discerned, and some slight regard be had to dates and characteristics. Gower is dull. No doubt; nevertheless, as he must have composed his ballads about the middle of the fourteenth century, there is some difficulty in supposing him to have been working in the "ingenious but exhausted vein" of Charles of Orleans, who began to write after the battle of Agincourt. Nor because Gower borrowed from Jean de Meung, for the machinery of his *Confessio Amantis*, the single idea of confession, need we at once leap to the conclusion that he was in other respects an imitator of that savage satirist; or indeed that the latter, in the

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Roman de la Rose, was animated by any such commonplace motive as "to explain and classify the impediments of love." It is certainly a trifling matter to be ignorant that there is no essential resemblance between the *Temple of Glass* and the *House of Fame*, and that, so far as any trace of "copying" is visible, the imitating author of the former poem was not Hawes, but Lydgate; but facts are perhaps held in too great contempt when "originality" is specially attributed to Lydgate, the most voluminous and plodding translator of the Middle Ages. One of Lydgate's translations (preserved at the end of a rare black-letter folio)[1] is entitled "The Dance of Machabree," and deals with the subject of the *Dance of Death*; but as this funereal composition is entirely guiltless of "buffoonery or gaiety," "sad or bitter," it may be conjectured that M. Taine's ideas of its character were derived from an imperfect recollection of what he "found in Warton" about the *Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins* by William Dunbar.

Morose, indeed, would an Englishman be, if he complained of the lively critics of France, who study the masterpieces of our literature with so much acuteness, and often with so much appreciation, because they turn with distaste from the lisping numbers of our earlier poets.[2] I have referred to M. Taine's critical method for the purpose partly of illustrating the disadvantages arising from Warton's chronological treatment of his subject, partly of proving to the English reader that we ourselves cannot afford to skim with the same lightness as M. Taine over two centuries of our national verse. For it is very certain that the poets of the late English Renaissance, whom M. Taine admires, by no means shared his opinion of Gower. In *Pericles*

[1] The only place where I have ever seen this poem is in Tottel's edition of the *Falls of Princes* (1554), a copy of which is in the British Museum.

[2] Yet M. Jusserand, writing with all the qualities of his nation, has succeeded in clothing the subject with amenity and interest in his *Histoire Littéraire du Peuple Anglais* (1894).

Prince of Tyre, parts of which were perhaps written by Shakespeare, Gower is introduced before each Act in the character of chorus, and at the opening of the play he is made to address the audience in doggerel verse as follows :—

> To sing a song that old was sung,
> From ashes ancient Gower is come ;
> Assuming men's infirmities,
> To glad your ear, and please your eyes.
> It hath been sung at festivals,
> On ember-eves and holy-ales ;
> And lords and ladies in their lives
> Have read it for restoratives ;
> The purchase is to make men glorious ;
> *Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius.*
> If you, born in these latter times,
> When wit's more ripe, accept my rhymes,
> And that to hear an old man sing
> May to your wishes pleasure bring,
> I life would wish, and that I might
> Waste it for you, like taper-light.

In a word, the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists regarded themselves as the lineal descendants of the poets of the fourteenth century : they made use of their materials; they inherited something of their spirit ; they even reproduced features of their style. If we are to understand the motives of the finished poetical architecture of the writers of the English Renaissance we must examine the foundations on which they built.

And this fact has a strong bearing on a method of critical interpretation exactly opposite to the depreciating spirit exhibited by M. Taine, and likely to have greater influence with the readers of our own time. Within the last twenty years a school of English humanists has arisen, which seeks to explain the character of all masterpieces of literature and art by personal sympathy and intuition, or by what may be justly called the method of

"appreciation." The word is one which cannot fail to recall to many of us how much has been lost to English literature by the recent deaths of two men of great distinction, Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds. By their writings they exercised a wide influence on the most cultivated part of English society; their memory is endeared to the writer of these words by many cherished associations. One of them possessed a subtle and penetrating imagination, which he used to re-embody the ideas he derived from the study of works of art and literature in historic fiction, and in forms of language peculiarly his own; the other, with a nature most keenly alive to every kind of artistic beauty, communicated his impressions to the reader in words which reflected his own enthusiasm. Both were nearly of an age; both passed away almost suddenly in the maturity of their powers; both have left behind them works on which, as on the songs of Heraclitus, "Death, the ravager of all things, will not lay his hands."

Very characteristic are the words in which Pater and Symonds define the Renaissance, the period to which each of them had chiefly directed his study.

"For us," says the former, "the Renaissance is the name of a many-sided, but yet united movement, in which the love of the things of the intellect and the imagination for their own sake, the desire for a more liberal and comely way of conceiving life, make themselves felt, urging those who experience this desire to search out first one and then another means of intellectual or imaginative enjoyment, and directing them not merely to the discovery of old and forgotten sources of this enjoyment, but to divine new sources of it, new experiences, new subjects of poetry, new sources of art. *Of this feeling there was a great outbreak in the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the following century.*"—*The Renaissance*, by Walter Pater, p. 3 (1877).

"In the word Renaissance, or new birth," says Symonds, "in the phenomenon of Europe arousing herself from the torpor of ten centuries, we detect a spiritual regeneration, a natural crisis, not to be explained by this or that characteristic of its evolution, but to be accepted as an instinctive effort of humanity for which at length the time was come, which had been anticipated by the throes of centuries, and in the onward progress of which we still participate. . . . In the period between 1450–1550, we find *a sudden intellectual illumination, a spontaneous outburst of intelligence*."—*The Renaissance of Modern Europe*, pp. 4, 5. A lecture delivered before the Sunday Lecture Society, by J. Addington Symonds (1872).

Hence it will appear that Symonds and Pater, while differing from each other widely as to the general nature, and even as to the date, of the Renaissance, agree in regarding it as a sudden and isolated movement of the human mind, which cannot be explained by the ordinary methods of historic investigation. Now, whatever be the charm of works produced by men who were able to imprint on their creation or criticism the stamp of originality, I cannot but think that such a method of interpretation, if generally adopted, must lead to a very erroneous conception of our own relations both to the Middle Ages and to the Renaissance. For there seems to be an obvious inconsistency in regarding the Renaissance as a sudden, mysterious, inexplicable movement, and in insisting at the same time that the meaning of this movement can be divined by the sympathetic intuition of modern criticism. Or, to put the case in the concrete, when a critic, with his thoughts full of the ideas, sentiments, associations, and prejudices of his age, seeks to interpret the mysterious phenomena of the remote past by mere personal sympathy, it must surely frequently happen that what he takes for a positive appreciation of historic truth

is, in reality, nothing more than an analysis of the impressions he observes in his own mind.

In this history I ask the reader to follow a longer, I think a more certain, but perhaps a less attractive road. M. Taine has said with justice that there is a certain resemblance between the work of the Middle Ages and the work of the decadence of the Roman Empire. This similarity is no more than natural, since the one period was the intellectual parent of the other; and in the same way the poetical work of the sixteenth century in England retains some of the features of the fourteenth, because the Renaissance is in touch with the Middle Ages. The business of historical criticism is to trace the stream of thought that connects age with age, and the almost imperceptible gradations which mark the advance of language and metrical harmony. By this means the transition of imagination from mediæval to modern times will appear much less abrupt and mysterious than we have been accustomed to consider it. Nor is the history of the early stages of our poetry wanting in an interest of its own. Gower, Lydgate, Occleve, and others, may be in themselves the dull folk that M. Taine finds them, but they rise into a position of some dignity when they are regarded as the pioneers of our poetry; and the reader who will have the patience to master the general character of their work will be rewarded for his labour by the fuller appreciation he will thereby bring to the study of later and greater writers.

It will be seen from the correspondence before cited that Gray would have excluded dramatic poetry from the purview of his history, and Warton expressed the same intention, though his history shows that he did not strictly abide by it. The nature of their designs made such a limitation in the scope of their work perfectly reasonable. I think, however, that, in a history which attempts to trace

the growth of imaginative life in the English nation through its poetry, it would be hardly possible to treat the subject with completeness without reference to the development of the drama. But as the history of the English theatre has been separately written by skilful hands, I shall treat of it only in a condensed form, and in so far as it illustrates the general design of this work.

3. A modern History of English Poetry must deal not only with the progress of poetical invention, but with the more technical question of the development of metrical harmony. And here I feel that a kind of apology is due to two classes of readers. First, to the philologist. I have made no special study of the science of Philology, and whatever knowledge I possess is derived from those who speak on the subject with recognised authority. The period of poetry treated in this volume has become almost the property of the philologists, and in availing myself of their labours for my own critical purposes, it may well be that I have been guilty of many errors, not, I would fain hope, of principle, but of detail. I shall be sincerely grateful to any one who will point out to me the existence of these mistakes, that I may hereafter have an opportunity of correcting them. But I have also to ask for the indulgence of the general reader, whose interest in the earlier stages of our poetry I am particularly anxious to arouse. I am well aware that men shrink with even more repugnance from archaisms of language than from obsolete modes of thought; and I can only remind the reader that a certain knowledge of the older forms of our tongue is absolutely necessary for a full appreciation of the style of our greatest writers. The amount of labour required for the purpose is, however, much less than is often supposed. In order to illustrate the progress of our poetry I have made one or two selections from Anglo-Saxon, and many from old

English, compositions. Wherever I have done this I have reproduced the original text without, as a rule, attempting to modernise it; but I have given in the footnotes either a translation of each passage, or such a vocabulary as will enable the reader, without much difficulty, to gather the drift of the meaning.

These words of explanation and apology must be concluded with a word of grateful acknowledgment. To one who, like myself, can devote only a limited portion of time to research, it is all-important to have quick access to the sources of reference. My warmest thanks are therefore due to the authorities of the British Museum, who have in this respect made a task now continued for some years easy and agreeable to me. From every one of the officers and staff in the reading-room of that unrivalled institution I have received unfailing marks of courtesy and attention. I scarcely know how to acknowledge in adequate words my debt to Mr. G. K. Fortescue, superintendent of the reading-room, for the unwearied kindness he has shown in providing me with all the materials I have required, and in directing me to possible channels of information. I desire also to express my special gratitude to Mr. R. Wilson and to Mr. G. W. Barwick for the patience with which they have ministered to my frequent wants; and to Mr. H. Jenner, for the readiness with which he has more than once placed at my disposal his wide knowledge of the mediæval romances.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY—THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF THE SUBJECT

I HOPE to be able to complete in the following pages the History of the Art of English Poetry from the time of Chaucer to the time of Scott. By English Poetry I mean metrical compositions, written in our language from the period at which it becomes fairly intelligible to readers of the present day. By the Art of English Poetry I mean all characteristic writing of a metrical kind that can be classified under any of the recognised forms of composition,—epic, dramatic, lyrical, or didactic. And by the History of the Art of English Poetry I mean, not simply an appreciation of the motives by which each individual poet seems to have been consciously inspired, but also an inquiry into those general causes which have unconsciously directed imagination in this country into the various channels of metrical composition.

Before embarking on a long and laborious task, I feel it expedient to deal with a doubt that may be raised, whether the subject is one that really possesses the unity and consistency I have claimed for it. For it is no doubt the case that what is often meant by a History of English Poetry is merely an account of the lives of the English poets, and such an estimate of their works as may be formed by the judgment of the particular historian. The very essence of poetry is supposed to lie in the inspiration of the individual poet, the sources of which are beyond the reach of critical investigation.

Nor do I deny that there is some truth in this view of the matter. It may be freely admitted that, in estimating that indefinable quality called Genius, the force that makes a great poet, a great statesman, or a great general what he is, must necessarily defy analysis. Nevertheless, in all the arts every student soon learns, and every great artist has acknowledged, that those who would excel must take account of conditions which they did not create and can only partially control. "Milton," says Dryden, "was the poetical son of Spenser and Mr. Waller of Fairfax, for we have our lineal descents and clans as well as other families. Spenser more than once insinuated that the soul of Chaucer was transfused into his body, and that he was begotten by him two hundred years after his decease. Milton has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original, and many besides myself have heard our famous Waller own that he derived the harmony of his numbers from the Godfrey of Bulloigne which was turned into English by Mr. Fairfax."[1]

As far then as regards the mere technical side of the art, it is certain that the sources of poetical production can be accurately traced. But there is something more. The poet is, in a sense, the epitome of the imaginative life of his age and nation; and, indeed, it may be said that in what may be called his raw materials—his thought, imagination, and sentiment—his countrymen co-operate in his work; though the form in which these materials are presented, an all-important contribution, is the creation of the poet alone. Almost every great English poet has shown his consciousness of the organic national life in which he shares, by some kind of apostrophe to the genius of his country; as, for example, when in a famous speech Shakespeare makes John of Gaunt say—

> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
>
> . . . . .
>
> This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,

[1] Dryden, Preface to the *Fables*.

Dear for her reputation through the world

. . . . .

That England that was wont to conquer others
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself;

or when, in the somewhat factious vein of the Opposition under George II., Pope cries out—

The plague is on thee, Britain!

or when Cowper, in a semi-Methodist spirit, declares—

England! with all thy faults, I love thee still;

or, once more, when Campbell exclaims in the enthusiasm of victory—

Now joy, old England, raise,
For the tidings of thy might!

A great poem is, in fact, an image of national feeling; the inward life of our nation is reflected not less clearly in the course of our poetry, than its outward growth in the achievements of its laws, arms, and commerce.

But on this point it is necessary to be precise. It is not to be assumed that English poetry is, in the same manner as the poetry of Greece, the spontaneous product of the soil, the air, and the institutions of the country. This assumption is frequently made. English literature is taken to mean all literature that has been produced in England; and as most Englishmen are of Anglo-Saxon descent, and the majority of English words have a Teutonic origin, English poetry since Chaucer is sometimes regarded as the natural development of Anglo-Saxon poetry, or at any rate as the fruit mainly of Anglo-Saxon genius. Scholars of great eminence—English, French, and German—have acquiesced in this treatment of the subject, so that it is a common thing to find all writings in prose or verse, produced in this country from the days of Cædmon to the end of the fifteenth century, classed together under the title of "Early English Literature."[1] Now, however

[1] Professor Ten Brink and M. Jusserand have adopted this method. Mr. Stopford Brooke has carried it farther than any one. In his valuable

convenient such an arrangement may be for the general historian of literature, it is not at the disposal of one who seeks to trace methodically the development of the art of English poetry. Between the poetry produced in England before the Norman Conquest and the poetry of Chaucer there is absolutely no link of connection. In the poems of the Anglo-Saxons the general reader finds an expression of the mind of a nation cut off from the long tradition of civilisation almost as completely as the Britons before they were brought under the Roman Empire;[1] a language still in its inflected stage, and hardly more intelligible to him than Russian or Sanskrit; and a metrical system, prevailing, doubtless, in the forests of Germany long before the days of Arminius, but which, even in Chaucer's time, had almost fallen into disuse. On the other hand, in the *Canterbury Tales*, he is in the presence of ideas and sentiments common to that western Christendom which, since the end of the eleventh century, had shown itself capable of concerted action; he reads, with comparatively little difficulty, a language so completely transformed from its ancient state, that its direct descent from the Anglo-Saxon can be barely recognised; and he may follow from their infant springs the course of new metres which, derived from France, are destined to swell into noble streams of harmonious English in the hands of Shakespeare and Milton, Dryden and Pope, Byron and Wordsworth.

The history of English poetry has, in fact, a far closer analogy with the development of Latin poetry, modified and directed as this was by standards introduced from without, than with the indigenous self-

History of Early English Literature, which is really a History of Anglo-Saxon Literature, he says: "The interest is even greater when we consider this (Anglo-Saxon) poetry in connection with the whole of English song. It will be seen that a great number of the main branches of the tree of English poetry had already opened out at this time from the stem, and that the ideal and sentimental elements of the earliest poetry have continued with natural changes to the present day. Here then, in the two hundred years between 670 and 870, the roots of English poetry, the roots of that vast overshadowing tree, were set; and here its first branches clothed themselves with leaves."—Preface, vi. vii.

[1] Penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos.—Virg. *Bucol.* Ecl. i. 67.

and the *Acta Sanctorum*; a reverence for the "authority" of the Fathers of the Church combines in his imagination with the spirit of destructive satire initiated by the *Romance of the Rose*.

But immediately we attempt to explain the strangely composite character of Chaucer's genius, by tracing its antecedents, we encounter a perplexing problem. The great principles of inspiration, blended in him, are now seen to diverge, and to flow as distinct rivers from opposite directions. By which line shall we proceed? If we follow the stream of Race and Language, we move towards the primitive homes of the Anglo-Saxons; if we follow the stream of Thought and Education, we travel into the region of mixed culture prevailing among the nations of joint Latin and Teutonic descent. Both tributaries of thought have the magnitude and interest of rivers; yet of the two arms one must be regarded as of superior importance in the history of English poetry; and the doubt, as to the direction in which lies the main fountain of the art, wraps the subject in mystery and obscurity like that which ce shrouded the sources of the Nile.

Revolution of 1688, the dwindling force of Mediævalism is discerned in the character of the poetry commonly called Metaphysical, and in the extravagance of the Romantic drama. After the Revolution the national principle and the classical principle combine their forces, while the genius of the Middle Ages seems to be so near extinction, that the closest observation is required to detect traces of its influence. Suddenly, about the latter half of the eighteenth century, the mediæval impulse is seen to revive; the classical tide begins to ebb; while the collective volume of national thought shows a tendency to distribute itself into a number of individual channels, a movement continued down to our own time, with a persistency of which all can perceive the extent, though none can calculate the issue.

Now, in the midst of all this variety there is plainly unity; and if we are to interpret rightly the meaning of these fluctuations of taste, and of their effect on the minds of individual poets, we must endeavour to trace them to their source. And here begins the difficulty of the historian. In one sense the poetry of Chaucer offers a singularly favourable starting point for an inquiry of this kind, since in him we see, for the first time, all the opposing principles just mentioned, united in such a way that the separate action of each can be clearly distinguished. Chaucer is justly called the father of our poetry, as having been the first to impose on the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary those Norman forms of harmony, which his successors have ever since continued to employ. In his poetry, also, we get the first glimpse of an organised nation with an instrument capable of giving articulate expression to its thoughts and interests. At the same time we observe there the working of primeval forces, older than the life of the English nation, more complex than the life of the Teutonic tribe. German feudalism, Latin Christianity, Oriental tradition, are all blended in his mind. Vague memories of the vanished Roman Empire linger in his tales, a curious medley of monastic history and barbarous legend. His poetical theology is a mixture of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

and the *Acta Sanctorum*; a reverence for the "authority" of the Fathers of the Church combines in his imagination with the spirit of destructive satire initiated by the *Romance of the Rose.*

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I have already said that an attempt to derive the originals of Chaucer from the cradles of the Anglo-Saxon race must necessarily end in disappointment. If, on the other hand, we seek to trace his imagination through its immediate literary sources,—if, that is to say, we connect it with the poetry of races of partial Latin descent,—we proceed on a course which at least enables us to link cause with effect. Leaving the strictly limited sphere of Anglo-Saxon interests, we come into touch with a great community of nations which, though they are separated from each other by differences of language and race, are still united by a common system of faith, education, and military institution, and can to a certain extent co-operate, like the states of ancient Greece, against a common foe. We see that the contemporary writers of this vast European society are dealing, under various conditions, with similar problems of thought. We see, moreover, that the problems with which they deal take their rise far off in a

more ancient system of civilisation, dimly discerned, but not joined to the life of Europe in the Middle Ages by any apparently continuous stream of literature. The secret course of the river must be traced through this interval before we can hope to arrive at the primal fountains of mediæval poetry.

That is the task I propose to myself at the opening of this history. In the next chapter I shall endeavour to show with some fulness the progressive stages in the formation of the mediæval stream of thought, which feeds the literatures of England, France, and Italy; and to connect it with the great system of Græco-Roman culture, which seems—but only seems—to disappear from the world after the death of Boethius. When we have followed this stream down to the period at which men began to make use of the modern European languages for the purposes of literature, we must explore the course of the national language in order to observe the changes produced by Saxon and Norman influences on the art of metrical expression, before it received the developments of Chaucer. Another chapter must be devoted to an examination of the meaning of the word "Renaissance," and of the early effects of the movement on the infant literature of Europe. We shall then be in a position to set in just perspective that evolution of poetical thought and language which I have described as characterising the art of succeeding poets.

The design of this work necessarily imposes certain limitations on the treatment of the subject. In the first place, as it is intended primarily for a history of poetical thought, I shall only deal with language in so far as its growth produces changes of rhythm or metre. In the second place, it is proposed to write of poetry as an art, rather than of the lives and work of individual poets. I shall, therefore, not attempt to furnish an exhaustive record of all surviving metrical compositions, but shall confine myself to selecting what is vital and characteristic, judging of every man's work as something contributed to the advancement of the art, or at least as illustrative of its

initial stages. The present volume will mainly furnish examples of the latter kind, for, with the exception of Chaucer, the Giotto of English poetry, almost all the early English poets resemble the Christian painters of the Byzantine era, whose genius failed to lift them above the stiff conventional forms imposed on them by tradition and education. Such art, usually devoid of beauty and originality, is yet exceedingly valuable as illustrative of motive; and indeed the poems of Chaucer himself, like the paintings of Giotto, are often more interesting for what is attempted in them than for what is actually accomplished, something of the life of the whole composition depending on the artist's imperfect mastery over his instrument of expression. No man in a history like this would be so foolish as to deprive himself of the interest rising from biographical detail, but I shall restrict myself as far as possible to such matters of the kind as throw light on each poet's character and work, and are therefore entirely germane to the subject. On the other hand, there are certain subjects not directly connected with poetry, such as the contemporary forces acting on religion and politics, which, as they contribute to the general movement of art, will properly find a place in this history; nor shall I shrink from diverging into the literature of other nations, when it seems useful to do so for the purpose of illustrating my argument.

A word must be added as to the method of criticism which will be hereafter adopted. I shall not attempt to judge the work of individual poets by any *a priori* standard, artistic or moral, but rather to form conclusions from experience and observation as to the causes of permanence in poetical life. This history will have to deal with poets whose creations, at the distance of five hundred, three hundred, two hundred years, are as fresh and vigorous as when they were first given to the world. Others will require attention who, after having been exalted by contemporary opinion as the equals of Homer and Virgil, have gradually sunk into neglect,—writers to whom the witty, if audacious, remark of

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Rochester on Cowley may be justly applied, "Not being of God they could not stand." It is the business of historical criticism to discover the reasons for these fluctuations of taste; and the course of our inquiry will show plainly that the secret of poetical, as of every other kind of life, lies in the union of opposite principles. It will be seen that as, on the one hand, the classical English poets are those who, by happiness of nature or judgment, have learned to harmonise in themselves conflicting tendencies of thought and language, and to bring them into just relation with the life of their own times, so, on the other, the great but decayed reputations belong to writers who have formed their art by thrusting some single principle of thought or language into undue prominence. But in order to appreciate the truth of this remark, the student must be in a position to trace the development of English poetry from its original sources.

CHAPTER II

THE CHARACTER AND SOURCES OF MEDIÆVAL POETRY

AN English reader who has formed his imagination on the works of the great classical authors, ancient and modern, who has, for example, read Homer and Horace and Virgil, *Don Quixote*, and the plays of Shakespeare and Molière, but who, ignorant of the literature of the Middle Ages, tries without preparation to gain an idea of the life of the period from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, soon finds that he is moving in a somewhat bewildering world. In the Prologue to those Tales he is introduced to a company of nine-and-twenty pilgrims drawn from every station in life, and separated from each other by the nicest distinctions of dress, speech, and manners, yet all associated for the moment in discharge of a common religious duty, and conversing among themselves on terms of perfect equality. The whole scene is brought before him full of life and colour by the large humanity and dramatic power of the poet. From certain survivals of names and things he may even be able to form a general idea of the constitution of the society represented in the poem, but in detail almost everything seems unfamiliar to him. What, for instance, is he to understand by the description of such personages as the Knight and the Franklin, the Reve and the Manciple, the Monk and the Prioress, the Pardoner and the Summoner? And as to the other characters, a very short acquaintance with them suffices to show that, if he is to sympathise with their feelings, to enter into their jests and by-play, and to appreciate their ways of

thought about man and nature, he must submit to a preliminary course of historical study.

If, on the other hand, we suppose—for the matter is one which can be best explained by illustration—a Roman of the age of Trajan to revisit the world, and to seek enlightenment as to the course of affairs since his time by referring to the poems of Chaucer, the case would not be very different. Such a reader would indeed find in Chaucer the mention of many persons and things which from old association would be "familiar in his mouth as household words." But in the extraordinary disguises in which they now presented themselves he would hardly be able to recognise his former acquaintance. Theseus become a "Duke," Ovid a "clerk," Virgil a "magician"; Roman emperors negotiating with Mohammedan sultans; the story of the Trojan War told, not by Homer, but by one Dares Phrygius;—such would be a few of the minor puzzles taxing his ingenuity, so that his perplexity would perhaps be even greater than that of the latter-day Englishman who approached the subject from the opposite side.

If yet, again, we imagine the English and the Roman reader brought into each other's company, it is certain that on many subjects they would be able to exchange ideas with little difficulty. Both, for example, would judge the vulgar Nasidienus, so inimitably described in Horace's satire, by one standard of breeding; both would sympathise heartily with the poet as he relates his capture by the bore on the Via Sacra. Our countryman might show his visitor how easily Pope, in his *Imitations of Horace*, had transferred Roman ideas into the social atmosphere of George II.'s reign; and how similar was the character of city life, as described in Juvenal's Third Satire, to that represented in Johnson's *London*. The Roman would find that Shakespeare had borrowed the plot of a Latin comedy for the Elizabethan stage, and would be able to follow, not without sympathy, the action of the chief English tragedies. On the merits of the *Odyssey* the ancient and the modern would be perfectly agreed, and they would probably not differ widely in their estimate of the *Romance of the Rose*.

In this parable are presented the conditions of the problem summed up for us in the familiar phrases, "The Middle Ages" and "The Renaissance." What is the meaning of such curious facts? How is it that, in matters of taste and feeling, we can readily sympathise with the thoughts of men who lived two thousand years ago, and who are separated from ourselves by race, language, and religion? How is it, on the other hand, that we find so much difficulty in putting ourselves in imagination into the intellectual position of Englishmen in the fourteenth century of our own era? The fact that we can easily understand the thoughts of the great writers of antiquity, means that our heritage of western civilisation,—that community of sentiment on questions of morals, taste, arts, and science, which is shared to a great extent by all the nations of modern Europe,—is derived in unbroken descent from the small group of Greek cities scattered five-and-twenty centuries ago along the shores of the Ægean and Ionian Seas. The fact that the sentiment of Europe during the central part of this tradition is apparently out of touch with its sentiment at the Greek starting point on the one hand, and with modern sentiment on the other, means that the course of civilisation has been so profoundly modified by wars, conquests, internal revolutions, fluctuations of commerce, and, above all, changes of religion, that the thread of continuity can with difficulty be traced. Finally, the fact that we ourselves find more in common with the life of the Greeks and Romans than with the life of Europe in the Middle Ages, means that, in the city states of antiquity, as in our own times, civil standards of thought prevailed, while, in the mediæval period, the predominant cast of thought was feudal and ecclesiastical. In the times of the Greeks and Romans, that is to say, before the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire, the religious and political elements of social life were inseparably blended in the general system of the State; in the Middle Ages there was a separation and conflict between the spiritual and temporal powers, with a predominating

influence on the side of the Church; since the fifteenth century there has been a tendency to a reconciliation or concordat between the opposing forces, the balance of power inclining to the side of the State. This great struggle contains the secret principle of the whole life and movement of European civilisation; and it is recorded, not more plainly in political history, than in the development of architecture, painting, sculpture, and, above all, of poetry. It is therefore necessary for a right understanding of the character of English poetry, at the point from which this history starts, to appreciate the nature of the vast change in the life of imagination effected during the decline of the Roman Empire and the gradual formation of the mediæval system in Europe. The subject is obscure and difficult, but I think it may be treated with something of completeness under the four following heads: I. The decline of the civic spirit under the Roman Empire, and the corresponding decay of classical taste. II. The transformation of the system of imperial education by the Latin Church. III. The rise of a new mythology among the nations embraced within the system of Latin Christianity. IV. The influence of feudal institutions, of the scholastic logic, and of Oriental culture.

I. When Constantine moved the seat of empire from Rome to Constantinople, his act may have seemed, in the eyes of his contemporaries, nothing more than the choice of a new capital by an absolute monarch, influenced by considerations, to use the words of Gibbon, of "beauty, safety, and wealth."[1] But, in the eyes of posterity, the event signifies rather the approaching dissolution of a great type of civilisation, the very memory of which, in its ancient form, was destined to remain in a state of suspended animation for nearly ten centuries.

By his abandonment of Rome, Constantine seemed to proclaim that the last spark of the civic life of antiquity, the two-fold creation of Greek and Roman genius, was finally extinguished. The Greeks had been the first to develop the type; and all the priceless treasure of art and letters,

[1] Gibbon's *Roman Empire*, vol. ii. p. 293 (Smith's edition).

the revelation of which so profoundly stirred the mind of Europe in the fifteenth century, was the product of that system of life in its highest perfection. The idea of the State lay at the root of every Greek conception of art and morals. For though, in the view of the philosopher, the virtue of the good citizen was not always necessarily identical with the virtue of the individual man,[1] and though, in the city of Athens, at all events, a large amount of life was possible to the individual apart from public interests, yet it is none the less true that the life of the individual in every Greek city was in reality moulded by the customary life, tradition, and character, in one untranslatable word, by the ἦθος, of the State. Out of this native soil grew that recognised, though not necessarily public, system of education (πολιτικὴ παιδεία), consisting of reading and writing, music and gymnastic, which Plato and Aristotle[2] themselves accepted as the basis of the constitution of the State. But this preliminary education was only the threshold to a subsequent system of political training, of which, in Athens at least, every citizen had an opportunity of availing himself by his right to participate in public affairs, so that, in the view of Pericles, politics themselves were an instrument of individual refinement. "The magistrates," said he in his great funeral oration, "who discharge public trusts fulfil their domestic duties also; the private citizen, while engaged in professional business, has competent knowledge in public affairs, for we stand alone in regarding the man who keeps aloof from these latter not as harmless, but as useless. Moreover, we always hear and pronounce on public matters when discussed by our leaders, or perhaps strike out for ourselves correct reasonings about them; far from accounting discussion an

[1] Aristotle, *Politics*, Book iii. c. 4.

[2] Aristotle, arguing for the necessity of a public system of education, says: "Again, as the end proposed to the State as a whole is one, it is clear that the education of all the citizens must be one and the same, and the superintendence of it a public affair, rather than in private hands as it now is, when each individual superintends his own children privately, and with such private instruction as he thinks good. The training in public business should be itself public"—*Politics*, v. 1 (Welldon's translation). Nevertheless he does not propose any *fundamental* change in the accepted curriculum.

impediment to action, we complain only if we are not told what is to be done before it becomes our duty to do it."[1]

The strenuous exertion of all the faculties of the individual in the service of the State, described in these eloquent words, reflects itself in the highest productions of Greek art and literature, and is the source of that "political" spirit which every one can detect, alike in the poems of Homer and the sculptures of the Parthenon, as the inspiring cause of the noblest efforts of imitation. It prevailed most strongly through the period between the battle of Marathon and the battle of Chæronea, and has left its monuments in such plays as the *Persæ* and *Eumenides* of Æschylus, the *Antigone* of Sophocles, the *Clouds* of Aristophanes, the History of Thucydides, and the orations of Demosthenes, its last embodiment being perhaps the famous oath of that orator on the souls of those who risked their lives at Marathon.[2]

But the work of the Greek in the history of civilisation began and ended with the autonomy of the individual city. Weakened as it was by factions within and rivalries without, no single Greek city was able long to maintain its supremacy, much less to impose its ideas upon the world. One by one they sank before the overwhelming Macedonian power, and, with the extinction of their liberties, the political motives for individual exertion expired. Henceforward the activity of the Greeks became solely intellectual. Knowledge and learning were now pursued for their own sake, and for the old system of political education (πολιτικὴ παιδεία) was gradually substituted the encyclopædic education (ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία), including the seven arts or sciences,—grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. But this cosmopolitan system proved itself nearly powerless to awake the fires of inventive genius. The civic spirit, the decline of which had already shown itself in the tragedies of Euripides, almost disappeared in the New Comedy of Menander; and, with the exception of the poetry of

[1] Thucydides, ii. 41 (Grote's paraphrase).

[2] Demosthenes, *De Corona*, p. 297, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔστιν, οὐκ ἔστιν, κ.τ.λ.

Theocritus and his fellow idyllists—the inspiration of which was no longer due to the city—late Greek literature failed to produce any characteristic form of art. The language fell into the hands of grammarians, sophists, and rhetoricians; whatever was invented by these men had a purely literary origin; and though their compositions have a certain interest of their own, they no longer reflect the feelings and energies of free political life.

It was reserved for an Italian city, inferior to many of the Greek states in intellectual power, to realise those ideas of empire which had been only dreams in the minds of men like Pericles and Epaminondas. Not nimble of wit, nor refined in taste, the Roman possessed a stubborn tenacity of purpose, an indomitable pride of race, a grandeur of political conception, and a genius for expanding his own institutions and understanding the ideas of others, which enabled him to bring the world within his imperial system. The greatness of Rome was as entirely civil in its origin as that of any Greek city, and, like the Greek cities, Rome, in the days of her freedom, and while she was still fighting for the mastery, preserved a system of political education, both in the hearth and the senate, which was suited to her character. The Roman character was formed mainly by the combination of two principles, the religion of the family and the discipline of the camp; and the education by which this type was maintained is well illustrated by a passage in Plutarch's life of Cato the Censor, who was, says the biographer, "himself his son's teacher in law, grammar, and in all the necessary exercises For he taught him not only how to throw a dart, to fight hand to hand, and to ride, but to box, to endure heat and cold, and to swim in the roughest and most rapid parts of the river. He wrote histories for him, as he further acquaints us, with his own hand, in large characters; so that without leaving his father's house he might gain a knowledge of the illustrious actions of the ancient Romans and of the customs of his country."[1]

[1] Plutarch's *Life of Cato Major*, c. 20. Quoted in Fowler's *City State*, p. 272.

A more complete contrast to the purely academic education, for which, in the declining days of the Empire, such careful provision was made, it would be impossible to conceive. And what is of particular importance to observe is, that, even after the introduction of Greek culture, Cato's educational ideal was felt to be the foundation of Roman greatness by the orators and poets who adorned the golden age of Latin literature. "For my part, judges," says Cicero in one of his speeches, drawing the character of the good citizen, "if a man be endowed with such strength of soul and such natural virtue and self-restraint as to be proof against pleasure, and to devote the whole course of his life to labour of body and application of mind; not seeking delight in quiet, or indolence, or the fashionable pursuits of the time, in games or in banquets; thinking nothing in life worthy of ambition unless it be accompanied with honour and dignity; this man is, in my opinion, furnished and adorned with certain divine qualities. Of this class I imagine to have been the Camilli, the Fabricii, and those who, with the slenderest resources, accomplished such mighty deeds."[1]

In the same vein Virgil, that ardent lover of antiquity, as Quintilian calls him, rises to the noblest heights of poetry in praising Italy as the mother of the Decii, the Marii, and the great Camilli.[2] Disgusted with the exaggerated wealth and luxury of the city, with its flood of servile clients rushing to the morning levée, and the roar of legal and political declamation, he refreshes his soul with the images of ancient simplicity: "This was the life that the old Sabines once held in honour; thus surely strong Etruria throve, and Rome became fairest of created things."[3] Horace, trained in the schools of Athens, finds, nevertheless, his true philosopher in the rustic Ofellus, a genuine Roman of the old style, "wise without rules, through rough mother-wit."[4] The teaching which moves his heart is that conveyed to him in the "nursery songs sung by

[1] Cicero, *Pro Cælio*, cap. 17. The whole of this speech is well worth reading as illustrating the decay of the Roman ἦθος.
[2] Virg. *Georgic.* ii. 169. [3] *Ibid.* ii. 534. [4] Horace, *Sat.* ii. 2. 3.

the manly Curii and Camilli."[1] His heroes, the subjects of his lyrical verse, are the rude old farmer generals of the Republic. Their ideals are his: "an estate of no great extent, with a garden, a spring of fresh water, and perhaps a little wood."

Pietas and *gravitas*: these are the two qualities produced by the Roman political education which distinguish alike the character of the great men of the Republic and the style of the great authors of the Golden Age.[3] But this character was not destined to endure.

> Græcia capta ferum victorem cepit, et artes
> Intulit agresti Latio.

The very poets and orators who most nobly celebrated the ἦθος of their country had learned their cunning from Greek masters. Conscious of her own inferiority in art and philosophy, Rome accepted with deference the Alexandrian summary of Hellenic culture which she found established in the cities of the East, and carried the encyclopædic system of education as the companion of her arms and laws into the communities which she created after the Roman model in Spain, Gaul, and Britain. Beneath this cosmopolitan solvent the "piety" and "gravity" of the old national style were gradually decomposed alike in literature and politics. We see them on the eve of extinction in Juvenal's fierce denunciations of the growing trivialities of Roman life; the chatter of small poets reciting in the city, the declaiming school-boys, the jockey consul driving his chariot over the ashes of his ancestors, the starveling Greek with his smattering of encyclopædic knowledge. No moral satire could arrest the course of inevitable decline. As all real power became centralised in the Emperor, and the importance of Rome in the imperial system constantly diminished, the Roman citizen ceased to feel the stimulating influence of the ancient

[1] Hor. *Epist.* i. 1. 64. [2] Hor. *Sat* ii 6. 1-3.

[3] *Pietas* is a word sufficiently illustrated by the name of Virgil. As to the other, St. Jerome (*Epistola ad Rusticum*) reminds a correspondent how his mother had sent him from Gaul to Rome, "ut ubertatem Gallici nitoremque sermonis *gravitas Romana* condiret."

political education. He inverted the rule of Cicero, and no longer finding anything on the petty stage of municipal life "accompanied with honour and dignity," thought "nothing worthy of ambition."

But while the reverence for the national ἦθος thus waned, the Romans attached an ever-increasing value to mere intellectual life and Hellenic culture. The encyclopædic education came to be looked upon as something that every gentleman was bound to have received, and even so conservative a critic as Quintilian considers a knowledge of music and geometry as part of the necessary training of a good orator.[1] In the time of the cosmopolitan Hadrian, this fashion became so much of a craze, that Greek began to supersede Latin in the language of polite society. After this date the Roman classical spirit may be accounted dead in Latin literature. Rhetoric, once treated as an instrument for training the mind in public business, was now studied for its own sake; the strong Roman sense of Quintilian was exchanged, in a critic like Fronto, for quibbling refinement about words; poets of such real talent as Ausonius possessed, devoted themselves to the elaboration of epigrams and acrostics; and bishops with the natural good taste of Sidonius Apollinaris aimed at acquiring a reputation for style as polite letter-writers. Here and there a man of genius, Claudian or Rutilius, struck a note of the genuine Roman character; but these are after all little more than literary echoes, and, generally speaking, so far from the Hellenism of the Roman Empire having been suppressed, as some think, by the antagonism of Christianity, it is evident that, had there been no Popes and no barbarians, that form of culture must have perished from internal decay.

The loss of civic liberty, with all the code of manners and taste that depended upon it, was the loss of Rome herself. But there is another, and for the world in general a more important, side of the question. In the history of mankind Rome must be judged, not simply as a

[1] Quintilian, *Institut.* i. 10: "Nunc de ceteris artibus, quibus instituendos, priusquam rhetori tradantur, pueros existimo, strictim subjungam, ut efficiatur orbis ille doctrinæ, quem Græci ἐγκύκλιον παιδείαν vocant."

single state, but as the head of a great imperial system, embracing the entire material fabric of ancient civilisation, as the guardian of the independence of individual cities, as the propagator of all the Hellenic arts of life, in a word, as the protectress of whatever was understood by the famous phrase, *Pax Romana.* This was the light in which she appeared to her grateful provincial subjects even in the last day of her decline. It was natural that to Horace and Virgil, writing at the height of her greatness, she should have seemed "the first of cities,"[1] "the most beautiful of things."[2] But long afterwards, when the seat of empire was in Constantinople, the Gallic Ausonius gave the first place in his list of noble cities[3] to "Golden Rome, the home of all the gods." Claudian, an Egyptian, introduces her in one of his poems as herself a deity;[4] and her divine attributes are summed up in what is perhaps the most remarkable tribute ever paid to her power, as it is certainly the last flash of genuine inspiration in Latin poetry. Six years after Alaric had appeared before the gates of Rome, Rutilius Namatianus of Gaul thus addressed the imperial city in his *Itinerary:* "Hear, O Queen, fairest in all thy world, Rome, received into the starry skies! Hear, parent of men, parent of gods! in thy temples we are not far from heaven."[5] Improving on the phrase of Ovid, he gives a juster reason than that poet for the dominion exercised by the city over the world.[6] "Thou also, embracing the world in law-bringing triumphs, makest all

[1] Princeps urbium, Hor. *Od.* iv. 3. 13.

[2] Virgil, *Georgic.* ii. 534. [3] *Urbium Nobilium Ordo.*

[4] Claudian, [illegible]

[5] [illegible]

Rutilius, *Itinerarium*, 47.

[6] Dumque offers victis proprii consortia juris,
Urbem fecisti quod prius orbis erat.—*Ibid.* 65.

These lines are doubtless a reminiscence of Ovid, *Fasti*, ii. 683:—

Gentibus est aliis tellus data limite certo,
Romanis spatium est Urbis et Orbis idem.

The phrase remains in the Papal "Benedictio Urbi et Orbi."

things live by a common rule. Thee, goddess, thee, every nook that is Roman celebrates, and bends a free neck beneath thy peaceful yoke."[1] Even when sacked by the Goths, Rome appears to Rutilius as she had appeared to Horace, recalling her struggle with Hannibal. "The times which remain to thee are bounded by no goal, while the earth shall stand, while the heaven shall bear the stars. What dissolves the life of other kingdoms restores thine: the law of thy renewal is the power to grow greater through misfortune. Come then, at length, let the victim of the sacrilegious race perish; let the trembling Getæ bow their perfidious necks. Let the pacified lands pay rich tribute; let the booty of the barbarians fill thy majestic bosom."[2]

In this splendid and passionate invocation, which doubtless expressed the feelings of every provincial citizen of the Roman Empire, Rutilius is addressing Rome as the great bulwark against the tide of barbarism that threatened to submerge whatever remained of the Greek system of civilised life. To preserve and propagate the Hellenic type had been an ambition with the Romans of the Empire, not less dearly cherished than the establishment of their own dominion. So profound was their admiration for the genius of Athens that they never treated that city as a subject, but as an equal and ally; while all the Greek cities of Asia Minor, after due provision had been made for the maintenance of imperial order, were left at liberty to manage their own internal affairs. A similar tolerance was displayed in dealing with the younger cities of the

[1] Tu quoque legiferis mundum complexa triumphis
  Fœdere communi vivere cuncta facis.
Te, Dea, te celebrat Romanus ubique recessus,
  Pacificoque gerit libera colla jugo.
Rutilius, *Itinerarium*, 77.

[2] Quæ restant nullis obnoxia tempora metis,
  Dum stabunt terræ, dum polus astra feret.
Illud te reparat quod cetera regna resolvit;
  Ordo renascendi est, crescere posse malis.
Ergo, age, sacrilegæ tandem cadat hostia gentis;
  Submittant trepidi perfida colla Getæ.
Ditia pacatæ dent vectigalia terræ;
  Impleat augustos barbara præda sinus.—*Ibid.* 137.
Compare Horace, *Od.* iv. 4. 65, *Merses* profundo, pulchrior evenit, etc.

West, which were indeed bound to provide for the maintenance of schools for instructing the young citizens in the Greek encyclopædic system, but were otherwise left free to regulate their own business; the Roman franchise being extended to all who had discharged a municipal office or had served in the army. Hence till the barbarians broke through the imperial boundaries, a multitude of cities in Spain, Gaul, Britain, and along the shores of the Mediterranean, sheltered themselves in the bosom of the Roman Empire, all united by a common bond of taste and education, and each animated by some measure of local patriotism. St. Paul, who so highly valued his privileges as a Roman, felt that, as a native of Tarsus, he was a citizen of no mean city. The Athenian boasted of his famous schools till they were closed by the intolerance of Justinian. The silversmiths of Ephesus were proud of the world-wide fame of their great goddess Diana. In the West, Bordeaux rejoiced in the number and eloquence of its professors; Narbonne in the variety and picturesqueness of its costumes; Treves in the grandeur of its baths; Toulouse in the vast circuit of its brick walls; Milan in the peristyles of its houses adorned with marble statues; and Arles in its street-like bridge across the Rhone.[1]

With a surface of such external splendour, it is not surprising that Rutilius and all his pagan contemporaries, as they contemplated this vast cosmopolitan system, should have failed to perceive that the particular form of civilisation they were so anxious to preserve was nothing but the colour on the face of a corpse. But it is of the highest importance that the student of modern literature should guard himself from falling into the same error,—an error, it must be added, likely to spread, in consequence of theories as to the nature of the Renaissance in Europe, which have been ably advocated and have obtained a wide acceptance. It has been argued that, since the appearance in the world of the Christian faith, there has been a continuous conflict

[1] See the description given of these cities by Ausonius in his *Urbium Nobilium Ordo*.

between that principle and the Hellenic ideal of life; that Hellenism was, in the first instance, vanquished by Christianity, which then, for many centuries, held dominion over the barbarous mind; but that, in the fifteenth century, the principle of Hellenism sprang suddenly into fresh life, and renewed a struggle which under various forms is proceeding at the present day.

A theory of this kind seems to place a false construction on the facts of history. It misrepresents the true cause of the first decline of Hellenism; it ignores the signal service performed in the cause of civilisation by the Latin Church, in bridging by its system of education the gulf between the science of the ancient and modern worlds; it repeats the mistake of the Italian Humanists of the fifteenth century, who sought to revive the forms of ancient art without reference to the spirit which animated them. I have already dwelt on what I believe to be the real causes of the decline of true classic taste. We must now proceed to consider how much of the great classic tradition was preserved by the Church, when she became the representative and trustee of the interests transmitted to her by the Roman emperors.

II. We are so accustomed to view the first apostles and missionaries of Christianity in an exclusively religious light, that we are apt to forget that many of them were also Roman citizens, and all of them Roman subjects. They themselves never forgot this. Though the Christian Church formed from the first a self-governed community, its rulers were always mindful of their external relations to society at large. "Strangers and sojourners" Christians were, indeed, taught to consider themselves, but at the same time they were "to submit themselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." They knew that they had in the world "no continuing city"; nevertheless their thoughts and language about this life as well as about the life to come were all coloured with the idea of citizenship. Rules for their behaviour in various secular situations were carefully laid down; they described the

course of spiritual development by metaphors borrowed from the customary employments of their fellow-citizens; when they tried to conceive of the nature of existence beyond the grave they did so under the image of a heavenly city; in philosophic thought the ideal "Republic" of Plato changed naturally into the "Civitas Dei" of Augustine. When Christianity was established as the religion of the State, it was a frequent experience for men who had discharged high municipal functions to pass to high offices in the Church. St. Ambrose, before his election as Bishop, had served in all the usual civil offices; St. Gregory in the same way had been prefect of the city; St. Augustine and St. Jerome were both of them teachers of rhetoric in the imperial schools. Not only did men thus trained in habits of civil administration bring a capacity for business into the conduct of the affairs of the Church, but in the decay of society they came to be preferred as the guardians of order above the civil officer. The letters of St. Gregory furnish a striking illustration of his activity in secular administration;[1] and the example of the Pope was doubtless followed on a smaller scale by other bishops in the different cities of the Empire.

Prominent among civil duties was the provision of public education. The Roman system of liberal education in the decline of the Empire was comprised in the encyclopædic circle of the seven arts or sciences,—grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. This classification, first introduced into the Latin language by Varro, from Alexandria, gradually replaced, as has been already said, the older political education, represented by the system of Cato the Censor. For a long time it was doubtless enjoyed merely as an intellectual luxury by a few wealthy and cultivated citizens; but Quintilian shows us that in his day it was beginning to be the recognised curriculum of the schools.[2] In the fourth century decrees of the Emperor Valentinian provided for general instruction in rhetoric and grammar to be given in

[1] Gibbon's *Roman Empire*, vol. v. p. 361 (Smith's edition).
[2] Quintilian, *Instit.* i. 10.

the metropolis of every province, and for the salaries, privileges, and exemptions to be enjoyed by professors of the arts.[1] Augustine and Martianus Capella treat of the seven sciences in the early part of the fifth century as the sum of liberal education. In the former we find, perhaps, the first indication of the famous distinction between the *trivium* and *quadrivium*; the latter endeavoured to enliven the dry nature of the instruction by clothing it in a fanciful allegory. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the imperial system of education was immediately smothered by the irruption of the barbarians. The effects of the invasion were felt most severely in the country districts; in the towns the old order of civil life lingered on, and here the influence of cultivated bishops, like Sidonius Apollinaris, was doubtless actively employed in defence of taste and learning. When the Visigoths overran the south of France (409 A.D.) they spared the schools of Narbonne, Tours, Bordeaux, Arles, and Toulouse; the Burgundians, who affected to patronise letters, showed favour to the schools of Lyons, Vienne, Aix, and Perigneux (413 A.D.); and the chivalrous Franks were so indulgent, that forty years after their arrival in Gaul (A.D. 428) the regular teachers of rhetoric could still exercise their profession.[2] As late as the end of the sixth century the seven sciences, taught according to the method of Martianus Capella, appear to be holding their ground in the Bishop's school at Tours.[3]

Thus the framework of the old Hellenic form of encyclopædic education was safely transmitted from the imperial to the Church schools. And some traditions of the principles of taste and criticism must also have survived, for though the multitude of grammarians and rhetoricians in the decline of the Roman Empire in-

[1] On this subject see Gibbon, vol. iii. p. 247 (Smith's edition).

[2] Epistle of Claudianus Mamertus "Ad Sapaudum rhetorem": "Quorum egomet studiorum quasi quandam mortem flebili velut epitaphio tumularem, nisi tute eadem venerabili *professione*, laudabili solertia, acri ingenio, profluente ingenio, resuscitavisses," cited by Eichhorn in his *Geschichte der Kultur und Litteratur*, vol. ii. p. 10.

[3] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 10.

troduced a vast variety into the details of teaching, yet the authorities in the different sciences were recognised, and the best text-books came to be agreed upon by a process of natural selection. Nevertheless, when liberal education passed under the control of the bishops it encountered a formidable obstacle. From very early times in the history of Christianity there had been a conflict between the school of Origen, who recommended the study of Greek poetry and philosophy, and the school of Tertullian, who condemned it. The weight of Christian opinion inclined to the latter side. "Refrain"—such was the order of the Church to the faithful—"from all the works of the heathen, for what hast thou to do with strange discourses, laws, or false prophets, which in truth turn aside from the faith those who are weak in understanding? For if thou wilt explore history, thou hast the Books of the Kings; or seekest thou for words of wisdom and eloquence, thou hast the Prophets, Job, and the Book of Proverbs, wherein thou shalt find a more perfect knowledge of all eloquence and wisdom, for they are the voice of the Lord, the only wise God; or dost thou long for tuneful strains, thou hast the Psalms; or to explore the origin of things, thou hast the Book of Genesis; or for customs and observances, thou hast the excellent Law of the Lord God. Wherefore abstain scrupulously from all strange and devilish books."[1]

How then were the teachers of the schools of the West to reconcile these instructions with the study of the seven liberal sciences? The study of rhetoric involved the study of grammar, and grammar, from the time of Quintilian down to that of Cassiodorus, had been treated as including both logic and style. "Grammar," says the latter, "is the accomplishment of speaking eloquently gathered from the illustrious orators and poets."[2] To study grammar was, accordingly, to study the works of the best heathen authors, and hence to disregard the prevailing

[1] Mullinger's *Schools of Charles the Great*, p. 8.

[2] Grammatica est peritia pulchre loquendi ex poetis illustribus oratoribusque collecta.—Migne, lxxix. 1152.

policy of the Church. Confronted with such an alternative there could be little doubt what would be the choice of men accustomed to live in daily expectation of the end of the world. To many of the Fathers, indeed, the struggle between devotion and taste was severe. St. Jerome tells us of the refreshment he found during his prolonged fasts in reading the works of Cicero and Plautus; but one evening, having fallen asleep, he dreamed that he was carried into heaven and heard a voice saying to him: "Ciceronianus es non Christianus; ubi enim thesaurus tuus ibi est cor tuum."[1] After this he religiously laid aside his favourite authors as temptations of the Evil One. His example was improved on in later times. When Desiderius, Archbishop of Vienne, made an effort to revive the study of the ancient authors as the best instruments of liberal instruction in grammar, he was reproved by Gregory the Great, who expressed his grief that Desiderius should instruct his pupils in that subject, "inasmuch," said he, "as the praises of Christ cannot be uttered by the same tongue as those of Jove."[2] When learning began to revive under Charlemagne, Alcuin, himself the director of liberal studies, forbade the reading of Virgil in the monastery over which he presided. "The sacred poets," he tells his disciples, "are enough for you: you need not let your imagination be sullied with the too luxuriant eloquence of Virgil's style."[3] On one occasion some young monks in the Abbey delighted themselves with the secret study of the poet. Alcuin heard of it and sent for one of them. "How is this, *Virgilian*," said he, in obvious allusion to St. Jerome's anecdote, "that without my knowledge, and against my orders, you have begun to study Virgil?" The monk threw himself at his feet, and with promises to abstain in future from such stolen pleasures, prayed for forgiveness which was hardly granted him.[4]

But however powerful this principle might be in itself, and in its effects on individual minds, the ideal was a

[1] *Epistola ad Eustochium.*
[2] Mullinger, *Schools of Charles the Great*, p. 77.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 110. [4] *Ibid.* p. 113.

survival from the first monastic age of Christianity, and *only suited to a society secluded from the world.* For Christianity established as the religion of the State, for a Church which aspired to direct the thoughts of kings, to define the faith in General Councils, to deal with schisms and heresies, it was soon perceived that something more of art and knowledge was required than sufficed for simple devotional exercises. It was not enough that the clergy should be able to read the Scriptures, to copy MSS. of the Fathers, to calculate the fall of Easter, and to join in the music of the Church services, though little else than this had been aimed at in the schools of Benedict and Cassian. The Church under Charlemagne began to revive the decayed tradition of the encyclopædic education inherited from the Roman Empire, and to adapt it to her own purposes. An interesting example of the compromise effected by the union of the two principles remains in the catalogue of the library at York preserved in the verses of Alcuin :—

> Illic invenies veterum vestigia Patrum ;
> Quidquid habet pro se Latio Romanus in orbe ;
> Græcia vel quidquid transmisit clara Latinis ;
> Hebraicus vel quod populus bibit imbre superno ;
> Africa lucifluo vel quidquid lumine sparsit.
> Quid pater Hieronymus, quod sensit Hilarius atque
> Ambrosius, præsul, simul Augustinus, et ipse
> Sanctus Athanasius, quod Orosius edit avitus ;
> Quidquid Gregorius summus docet, et Leo papa ;
> Basilius quidquid Fulgentius atque coruscant.
> Cassiodorus item, Chrysostomus atque Joannes,
> Quidquid et Althelmus docuit, quod Beda magister,
> Quæ Victorinus scripsere, Boetius, atque
> Historici veteres, Pompeius, Plinius, ipse
> Acer Aristoteles, rhetor quoque Tullius ingens.
> Quid quoque Sedulius, vel quid canit ipse Juvencus,
> Alcuinus et Clemens, Prosper, Paulinus, Arator,
> Quid Fortunatus, vel quid Lactantius edunt,
> Quid Maro Virgilius, Statius, Lucanus et auctor :
> Artis Grammaticæ vel quid scripsere magistri,
> Quid Probus atque Phocas, Donatus, Priscianusque,
> Servius, Euticius, Pompeius, Comminianus.
> Invenies alios perplures, lector, ibidem
> Egregios studiis, arte et sermone magistros,

Plurima qui claro scripsere volumina sensu,
Nomina sed quorum præsenti in carmine scribi
Longius est visum quam plectri postulat usus.[1]

It is scarcely too much to say that in this exceedingly valuable list we find a record of the various elements that combined to form the imagination of the Middle Ages. It represents the intermediate stage of scholastic education, in its transition from the pagan traditions, familiar to Sidonius Apollinaris, to that complete system which attained its climax with St. Thomas Aquinas. The great philosophical controversies which divided the Church, and brought the logic of the Schoolmen to confirm the authority of the Fathers, had not yet arisen; hence the rhetorical character of the education still prevails over the scientific; nevertheless we can plainly discern the "disjecta membra" of the seven liberal arts. Priscian, Donatus, and others supply the text-books for technical instruction in grammar, while the models of rhetoric are looked for in a crowd of second-rate Christian poets, who wrote on Biblical subjects in the fourth and fifth centuries, and occupy a place in the list superior to Virgil, Statius, and Lucan. Ovid, the most popular of all Latin poets in the Middle Ages, is not mentioned, probably because his name presented metrical difficulties. The mention of the "keen Aristotle" seems to point to the *De Interpretatione* of that philosopher translated by Boethius; but the whole treatment of Dialectic by Alcuin and others shows that Logic as an art was as yet little regarded in the education of the time. Still less attention was given to the sciences included in the Quadrivium, and probably all Alcuin's acquaintance with them was derived either from Boethius,—who had translated the Arithmetic of Nicomachus, and the first four books of Euclid, and who had written a treatise on Music,—or from the twenty books of *Etymologiarum* composed by Isidore of Seville, whose own acquirements in astronomy did not carry him much beyond the knowledge that the sun was larger than the earth. As to other

[1] Poema de Pontificibus et Sanctis Ecclesiæ Eboracensis.—Migne, ci. 843-4.

branches of secular instruction the list bears witness to the great authority of Pliny the Elder, whose *Historia Naturalis* was first condensed in the Encyclopædia of Isidore of Seville, and then partitioned among the numerous Bestiaries, Lapidaries, and Herbaries, which for many centuries provided the curious reader with a smattering of science. But almost the most striking feature in the library is the absence of any work of Greek or Roman history. The policy of Eusebius, whose aim was to discredit the records of pagan culture, has borne its fruit, and, till the Renaissance and the invention of printing, men's knowledge of the course of human events was mainly derived from the meagre chronicles of Jerome and Orosius.

In surveying the long course of intellectual evolution we have just been describing, the least imaginative mind can hardly fail to be impressed with the marks of order and design. A group of free states, confined within narrow limits, but highly favoured by genius and natural advantages, produce for the admiration of mankind examples of poetry, oratory, sculpture, and the other arts of life which have never since been equalled. But, with powers dwarfed and restricted by their mutual jealousies, they are unable to propagate the ideas they have originated. The fruits of their art and philosophy, systematically arranged under the great military power which has deprived them of their liberties, are carried into the cities of the South and the East. When the energies of the Macedonian Monarchy seem to be almost exhausted, the system of culture which has grown up in Alexandria is adopted by the Roman Republic, still in the vigour of its free civic life, and is established by its conquering arms, side by side with a universal system of justice and order, in the northern and western confines of the Empire Nevertheless the vast fabric of Roman civilisation must have perished through internal decay, had not the moral life of the world been regenerated by the establishment of Christianity, and new sources of political freedom been sup-

plied by the irruption of the barbarians. Nor could these alone have provided for the growth of human society, if the barbarians had been of a temper less sensible of the grandeur of the order they had overthrown, or if the ideal of Tertullian and Eusebius had prevailed in the government of the Church. From both these dangers Europe was saved, partly because Latin was the native language of the clergy, and partly because the Church had inherited the duties of the State with regard to public instruction. A slender stream of ancient culture was thus allowed to trickle through the unfertilising channel of encyclopædic education. Under this system, modified by various influences, Dante, John de Meung, Chaucer, and the English poets of the fifteenth century were trained in a twofold course, half rhetorical, half dialectical, and wholly characteristic of what are called the Middle Ages, since on its logical side it led directly to the philosophy of the Schoolmen, and on its rhetorical side to the movement of the Renaissance.

Whether the question presents itself to us in its secular or its ecclesiastical aspect, it may be regarded as certain that, in this continuous stream of education, first Greek, then Græco-Roman, then Roman-Christian, we find the controlling force which has, in one form or another, guided the imagination and judgment of every generation of poets from the days of Augustus down to our own era.

III. But it is just at this point that we arrive at the most difficult part of the problem. Granted that, through the history of what we call "liberal" education, we are brought into immediate relation with the intellectual life of the pre-Christian world, no such line of connection has yet been established between the traditions of Christian and pagan poetry. Indeed, so fresh and original appear the earliest metrical compositions in the vulgar tongues of modern Europe, so opposite too in character to the spirit of Latin poetry, that scholars have generally been content to regard them as the natural out-growth of barbarian genius, unaffected by the arts of past civilisation. Latin literature is supposed

to have died with Boethius; the succeeding centuries are named the Dark Ages; a fresh poetical departure is then assumed to have been made in the eleventh century of our era. Nevertheless it has been generally felt that an explanation ought to be furnished of the extraordinary difference, as well as of the close resemblance, between classical and modern poetry; and this was a subject which greatly occupied the minds of scholars at the close of the last and the beginning of the present century. Unfortunately the points of really essential difference were never accurately defined, and hence the discussion rambled into speculative theories respecting the derivation of knights, giants, enchanters, fairies, magic armour and the like, without ever making for the real heart of the question. The debate began with Thomas Warton's interesting Dissertation, prefixed to *The History of English Poetry*, on "The Origin of Romantic Fiction."[1] Bishop Percy had traced the origin of romantic poetical "machinery" to the poets of Scandinavia.[2] Warton, on the other hand, following Huet and Warburton, ascribed it to the Arabians, who, he imagined, communicated it to Europe through Spain and Sicily. A third school regarded the romantic superstitions of the Middle Ages as the metamorphosed remains of classic mythology[3] These conflicting opinions were ridiculed by Joseph Ritson, who maintained that what the other scholars had supposed to be conscious artistic inventions were nothing but the "natural superstitions" common to all nations in an early stage of existence.[4]

All this was very unsatisfactory To assume that the predominating element in modern poetry was "romantic fiction," and that the essence of romance was magic and adventure, was to start with most inadequate definitions. Ritson's dogma, that fictions, like those found in the old romances, were common to all nations in their infancy, was a piece of arrogant insolence. On

1 [illegible]
2 [illegible]
3 [illegible]
4 [illegible]

the other hand, the theories that these fictions were the products of Scandinavian or Celtic folk lore, that they were borrowed from the Arabians, that they were the natural products of Christian as opposed to pagan genius, ignored the extremely complex character of the romantic style. Gothic architecture has a character radically distinct from classic architecture, yet no one has ever ventured to suggest that the former was the spontaneous outgrowth of the Teutonic mind, or that its development was not to be considered in connection with the history of architecture as a whole.

At the beginning of the present century John Dunlop, author of *The History of Fiction*, made some very sensible remarks on these various hypotheses. "In the investigation of this subject," says he, "a considerable confusion seems to have arisen from the supporters of the respective systems having blended those elements of romance which ought to be referred to separate origins. They have mixed together, or at least have made no proper distinction between three things which seem, at least in their elementary principles, to be totally unconnected: (1) The arbitrary fictions of romance, by which I mean the embellishment of dragons, enchanters, etc.; (2) That spirit of enterprise and adventure which pervaded all the tales of chivalry; (3) The historical materials, if they deserve the name, relating to Arthur and Charlemagne, which form the groundwork of so large a proportion of this class of composition."[1]

Dunlop, while admitting an element of truth in the speculations of each of his predecessors, urged, and justly, that all of them had overlooked the important part played by feudal institutions in the determination of the problem as he had stated it. His own method of reasoning on the subject is lucid and orderly, and it was perhaps sufficient for his purpose, which was the History of Romantic Fiction. But Romantic Fiction is only one element in the History of Modern Poetry, and an element, moreover, inseparably blended with other principles, from

[1] Dunlop, *History of Fiction*, vol. i. p. 116 (edition of 1888).

which it must be detached before its origin can be fully and correctly explained. The question belongs, in fact, to the history of social thought, and the radical differences, as well as the subtle affinities, between classic and romantic poetry properly so called, must be examined as a change effected in the mind of Europe, in its transition from the system of the Roman Empire to the system of the Middle Ages.

That which constitutes the essential difference in character between the poetry of Greece and Rome and the poetry of the nations of mediæval Europe, is the opposite point of view from which each regards man and nature. From this circumstance, the consequence of a change in the religious belief of the more powerful races of the world, arises a difference in the mythological method which is the parent cause of all poetry. Mythology may be defined as the body of fable created by nations in an early stage of their existence to account for the origin of the world and the history of society. In such fables the poets of a later date find the materials for (1) the invention of supernatural machinery; (2) the representation of epic and dramatic action. This principle applies to all the poetry of Greece and Rome, and though it has worked less exclusively on the imagination of Christendom, still the influence of a belief in superhuman agency is manifest enough in poems like the *Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost*, and in such plays as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, the *Midsummer Night's Dream;* while the *Canterbury Tales*, *Orlando Furioso*, *The Faery Queen*, and the plots of the Elizabethan dramatists, are monuments of the use of romantic legend by poets of Latin-Teutonic descent. I shall endeavour in this section to illustrate the results of the variation of mythological method under each of the two heads I have indicated above.

(1) The prevailing feature in Greek mythology is its humanity. Whether the gods are described in their repose or in their action, the Greek poets invest them with the fine serenity that elevates the composition of their sculpture,—a feeling embodied even in that passage of swift motion in the *Iliad* representing Poseidon's passage

over the sea which Longinus selected as the highest type of the sublime;[1] in Aristophanes' incomparable picture of the cloud-goddesses rising from the waves to float in light vapours round the mountain-tops, whence they look down on the low-lying earth;[2] in the charming narrative of Herodotus recording how Pan appeared in the mountain solitudes to the runner on his way to Sparta to ask aid for the Athenians before the battle of Marathon.[3] Even when the Greek gods are represented as engaged in battle they are still placable, indeed humorous beings, possessing the same qualities as their human favourites, though in a higher degree. The heart of Pluto himself is not insensible to the charms of music. It is only when the moral law is violated that we find an intervention of the more abstract and terrible powers, Ate, Nemesis, and the Eumenides. As a rule the Greek thought of his gods as patrons and guardians, under whose protection he might place his house or his city; he built altars to them by the forest side or the running stream; and he introduced them into his dramas only when the situation became too complicated for solution by the agency of mere mortal men.

This strong human element in Greek religion was the product of several causes. It arose partly from the interpretation of nature in the natural light of polytheism; partly from the creativeness of the Greek mind; partly from the absence of all the restrictions imposed by inspired religious books. When the religious feeling grew cold, and when the interpretation of nature was felt to be inadequate, the Greeks had little difficulty in parting with stories which rested on no authority higher than oral tradition. The easy rationalism they introduced into their religion is well illustrated by the explanation of the myth of Boreas and Orithyia referred to by Plato at the opening of the *Phædrus*.[4] We feel instinctively that a faith of this kind would have been too shallow to have ever created the supernatural machinery of modern poetry. Let the Olympus of Homer be compared with the *Paradiso* of

[1] *Iliad*, xiii. 17-31.
[2] Aristophanes, *Nubes*, 275.
[3] Herodotus, vi. 105.
[4] Plato, *Phædrus*, p. 229.

Dante, the Nekuomanteia of the *Odyssey* with the *Inferno*, and the different moral aspect under which nature is viewed becomes at once apparent. There is nothing in the genius of polytheism akin to the powers in Christian literature, terrible, grotesque, or malignant, like the demons of Dante or the witches of Shakespeare; to those superhuman passions, dark and tragic, like the agony of remorse, hatred, and despair felt by Satan, as he gazes upon Eden in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The causes that determine the character of mediæval mythology are, first, that it is the invention of the mind interpreting nature through the medium of a written Revelation; secondly, that it has absorbed certain elements of a suppressed polytheism; and, thirdly, that in the place of polytheism it has substituted the principle of dualism. Instead of being, like Greek mythology, the spontaneous invention of a single race, the mythology of the Middle Ages was a vast accumulation of the literary ideas of many civilisations, which for centuries kept pouring into the interpretation of one sacred text, not only their own native fancies, but the glosses of commentators, the theories of philosophers, the memories of ancient superstitions, and even the inventions of deliberate forgers.

In considering the elements of this remarkable compound, it will be well to examine, in the first place, those which seem to have been contributed by the older forms of polytheism. The result of such an inquiry proves conclusively how untenable is the opinion of critics who hold with Ritson that the romantic fictions, prevalent in Europe in the twelfth century, are merely examples of folk lore common to all nations in a state of infancy. There is not in English poetry proper, nor indeed in the poetry of any nation containing elements derived from the Latin race, a single work which, like the *Nibelungenlied* of Germany, can be said to owe either its fable or its supernatural machinery exclusively to the polytheistic mythology of the ancient tribe. The whole of the superhuman framework of European poetry dates from a period subsequent to the conversion of the different barbarous races to Christianity. Yet our poetry is not without

traces of the older creed. To look on the heathen gods as mere creations of fancy would not have been in accordance with the views of nature held by the early propagators of the gospel; nor indeed, had they themselves been of this opinion, could they, as Christian missionaries, have persuaded their converts to share it with them. The existence of the deities, alike of the Greek citizen and the German tribesman, had in some manner to be explained, and, as a rule, the explanation was given in one of two ways. The Christian apostle at times pursued the line of thought which had been started by the Platonic philosophy, and refined away the personality of Jupiter, Mercury, and Minerva into delusive phantoms or idols (εἴδωλα).[1] This was a method of reasoning best adapted to the subtlety of the civilised mind. Ruder measures were required in dealing with the deeper rooted notions of the Greek or Roman villager and of the German barbarian. Any god, powerful enough to be worshipped in a sacred place or with an altar, was treated as an open enemy, and classed with "the devil and his angels." To these no indulgence was extended. They were banished from the earth; and even the memory of Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn—of Wotan, Thor, and Freia—was allowed to survive only in the days of the week or in the names of the planets.

But there were certain elements in the polytheistic creeds which could not be disposed of in this trenchant fashion. Now and then the missionaries encountered customs which were harmless in themselves, and to which the people were devotedly attached; deities endeared to the worshipper by some peculiar tradition of benevolence; beautiful and pathetic legends of the intercourse between gods and men from which the imagination was loth to part. Beliefs and institutions like these were

[1] Compare 1 Corinthians viii. 4-6: "We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, *whether* in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in *him*." Fulgentius, the grammarian, in later days classified the heathen gods according to their qualities; and his interpretations, which were much in vogue in the Middle Ages, form the basis of Lydgate's poem, *The Assembly of the Gods*.

too strong to be utterly destroyed, and could only be suppressed by being transformed. Conversion was accordingly the course adopted. Images and shrines of Minerva or Venus were consecrated to the Virgin; the Teutonic goddess Hellia gave her name to the abode of the devil; but another goddess, Ostara or Eostra, furnished the English name for the festival of Easter; and the heathen custom of fire-lighting at different times of the year was sanctioned by devoting it to the saint of the season.[1] Many stories were current of the travels of the Greek and German gods among mankind; to the missionaries who laboured among the barbarous races there seemed no impropriety in allowing these legends to be transferred to the persons of the Holy Trinity.[2] Nor did they wage any relentless war against the lesser powers of nature who were allowed to remain in possession of the air, the mountains, the rivers, and the mines, thus providing the English poets with a supernatural machinery of which the finest example is the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was different with the beings, whatever their kind, which derived their power from magic, for that was under the ban of the Church. Fays, enchanters, wizards, and witches, were all the servants of the devil, in whose service are engaged also the weird sisters who tempt Macbeth, though their actual originals are the more sublime Norns or Fates, who, in the German mythology, weave the web of destiny.

When allowance has been made for all the elements contributed to mediæval mythology by polytheism, it is still evident that by much the larger part of the "machinery" employed by the Christian poets is derived from written documents illustrative of the Christian religion. It must not be supposed, however, that the impersonation of the celestial or superhuman actors in modern European poetry is drawn immediately from the Bible, in the same way that the idea of the Greek gods is

[1] One of the most curious instances of conversion is the transfer to the patronage of Helena, the sainted mother of Constantine, of the Fire of St. Helena, the phenomenon ascribed by the Greek sailors to the influence of Helen, sister of Castor and Pollux.

[2] An example remains in the *Andreas* of Cynewulf

based upon the poems of Homer. In one sense the fixity of a written religion imposes a limit on imagination; but in another the authority attaching to every word of the inspired writings gives an opportunity to the myth-making faculty, inherent in human nature, of reading into the text meanings beyond what it seems superficially intended to convey. No Scripture was of private interpretation; but the inward spirit of the letter needed to be explained by the doctors who had given themselves up to the long study of its mysterious truths. A conspicuous result of this kind of interpretation is found in the Commentary of Gregory the Great on the Book of Job, in one passage of which he says that even the mention of particular times and seasons in the Bible is meant to have a moral significance. Thus, when we are told in the Gospel narrative of the events leading to the Crucifixion, that Peter stood at a fire of coals, for it was winter, and warmed himself, this is symbolical of the coldness of heart that led the apostle to deny Christ; and again there is allegory in the fact that the angels visit Abraham at mid-day, but enter Sodom by night.[1] It is plain that a similar method of reasoning employed on the text of Scripture with equal freedom and confidence, has created the whole cycle of legend, embodied in the poetical treatment of the devil and the celestial hierarchy, which makes so striking a figure in mediæval literature.

The formation of this great legend was exceedingly gradual. There is indeed manifest in the Bible the germ of that dualism on which the later poetical mythology is based.[2] There is also ample warrant for personifying the Power of Evil; for attributing to him his two leading qualities of tempter (ὁ πειράζων) and accuser (ὁ διάβολος); and even for identifying him with the deceiving serpent in the garden of Eden. But Satan nowhere distinctly

[1] *Commentary on Book of Job*, lib. ii. cap. 2.

[2] To say nothing of the plainly mystical narrative of the Fall of Man, compare such texts as Deuteronomy xxx. 15, 19: "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil. . . . I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing"; and Romans vii. 21: "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me."

appears in Bible history as the leader of the rebel angels; and the account of his attempt to set himself up as the rival of God, and of his fall, as well as the character assigned to him of emperor of the evil spirits; the distinct description of his abode; and the representations of his dealings with mankind; are all mythological conceptions founded partly on the ingenious collocation of scattered texts, and partly on the authority of apocryphal Scriptures.

There is, I believe, no appearance of this portion of the Satanic legend in Christian literature before the poem of Avitus, *De Originali Peccato*, composed towards the end of the fifth century. But from the distinct and definite form which it there assumes, it is clear that it must have been a long time in general circulation, and I have little doubt that Baron Rothschild is justified in ascribing its origin to Magian ideas which incorporated themselves in the Græco-Jewish literature of Alexandria before the Christian era.[1] It is at any rate certain that, having once found its way into the modern languages of Europe, it is always reproduced with the same unvarying features. Long before Dante painted the circles of the *Inferno*, an Anglo-Saxon poet—whether Cædmon or some other is doubtful and immaterial—had furnished in his *Paraphrase of Genesis* a striking narrative—containing the germ of *Paradise Lost*—of the events culminating in the fall of man. He describes the rebellion and expulsion from heaven of the proud angels; the creation of the earth to fill the void left in the system of the universe; the debate of the devils as to the measures to be taken against the new work of the Creator; the mission of one of them to tempt man to disobedience; the arguments employed vainly to seduce Adam, successfully to persuade Eve. It is scarcely necessary to say that none of these incidents are to be found in the narrative of

[1] *Le Mystère du Vieil Testament*, vol. i. pp. xli. xlii. The tradition must have been familiar to the author of the *Book of Wisdom*, who says (chap. ii. 24), "Nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world: and they that do hold of his side do find it." St. Jude also alludes to it. "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (ver. 6).

Scripture, and that not one of them is the original invention of Cædmon. The latter, no doubt, had studied the poem of Avitus, but his poem presents in a characteristically Teutonic form and spirit the materials he found in the Commentaries of Gregory the Great, where imagination is seen at work in a manner that vividly suggests the process by which the legend was gradually formed.

St. John in the Apocalypse had said that "the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven."[1] The image itself may have been suggested by some ancient Jewish tradition of whatever origin, but from it the conclusion was drawn that these angels had once occupied a definite district in heaven, from which they were expelled in consequence of a rebellion. Again, from the text, "Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north," Gregory taught that the north was peculiarly the devil's quarter, and after him Cædmon believed that the devil had once reigned in the north part of heaven.[2] For the same reason the Anglo-Saxon poet represents Eve, after she has eaten the apple, telling Adam that she has been thereby enabled to see God sitting in the south-east of heaven.[3] Like Dante, Cædmon conceives that Satan, after his expulsion, assumed a horrible and brutish form, and this idea is repeated in all the representations of the fall of Lucifer preserved in the English miracle plays of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It was left to Milton to present the unequalled image of gradually fading angelic power—

> His form had not yet lost
> All her original brightness, nor appeared
> Less than archangel ruined.

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[1] Revelation xii. 7, 8.

[2] Isaiah xiv. 13. *Commentary on the Book of Job*, lib. xvii. c. 24. Cædmon, *Metrical Paraphrase*, 3. 8 (Thorpe's edition). Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (Stallybrass), vol. iii. 1001, seems to think that this passage in Cædmon is based on a reminiscence of Teutonic mythology; but it is surely much more reasonable to suppose that the poet was acquainted with Gregory's Commentary on Job.

[3] Cædmon. *Metrical Paraphrase* (Thorpe's edition), 41. 34.

But Milton himself could cite authority for this idea of surviving brightness by coupling the text, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" with the verse in Isaiah, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!"[1]

At a date somewhat later than the production of Avitus' poem, somewhat before the publication of Gregory's *Homilies*, a fresh contribution from a different quarter was made to the mythology of the subject The constant expectation of the approaching end of the material world in which the early Christians lived produced in them a corresponding eagerness to obtain a clear knowledge of the life beyond the grave, reserved respectively for the righteous and the wicked. But in the text of Scripture this knowledge remained wrapped in impenetrable mystery. Except in the figurative language of the Apocalypse, there was little or nothing, in the inspired Word, to enable the mind to form an image of the future kingdom of the saints, and, in the absence of a direct revelation, religious curiosity naturally formed an alliance with metaphysics. The Platonic philosophy, having by its picturesque treatment of the doctrine of Ideas, made men familiar with the conception of a semi-personal constitution in the order of the unseen world, the needs of human nature rendered it almost certain that some writer would attempt to graft on this system of philosophy the authority of Revelation. In due time the necessary link between Platonism and Christianity was furnished by the writings ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite, of whom tradition relates that, after his conversion by St. Paul, he was consecrated Bishop of Athens and died a martyr for the faith. The works professing to be his, namely, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Interpretation of Celestial Names*, and *The Mystical Theology*, were in all probability the composition of some Christian Neo-Platonist of the fifth century; they were certainly cited publicly for the first time at a conference in the Palace of Constantinople between the Catholics and the Servians, A.D. 532. Coming, as was reported, from the personal friend and disciple of the apostle who had been caught

[1] Isaiah xiv. 12 and Luke x 18.

up into the third heaven, they soon acquired immense authority in the Church, and, being translated into Latin in the ninth century by Scotus Erigena, were treated by the Schoolmen as having the authority of Revelation. According to the teaching of Dionysius, between the Godhead, Trinity in Unity, and the world of man, there intervenes a celestial hierarchy consisting of three orders: Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones—Dominations, Virtues, and Powers—Principalities, Archangels, and Angels—of which orders the last, being nearest to mankind, are God's appointed messengers to our race. Each division of this hierarchy is minutely described by the writer; and in later ages it was believed, probably on the authority of the Cabbala, that each of the nine spheres surrounding the earth was under the government of one of these angels. No reader of Dante or Milton requires to be reminded that, from the imagery thus supplied (coupled, in the case of the *Divine Comedy*, with the planetary scheme of the astronomer Ptolemy), is taken the topography of the *Paradiso* and the angelic machinery of *Paradise Lost*.

The authority of Dionysius thus enabled the imagination to localise and render human the abstract idea of heaven. Nor were men left to evolve the mythology of hell by mere inference from the text of the Bible. An apocryphal document, analogous in origin and character to the writings of the Areopagite, furnished evidence of those last acts of the Saviour which the sacred narrative veils in mystery. The *Gospel of Nicodemus* is a translation, professedly made by one Æneas in the reign of Valentinian, of more ancient writings in Hebrew composed almost immediately after the events that they describe. It is in two parts, of which the first, relating the acts of Pilate, is merely an expansion of the history of the Evangelists; but the second, and more striking, records the incidents of Christ's descent into hell. The Jewish doctors being in council after the Crucifixion, news was brought to them of the resurrection of many dead persons who had been seen on the banks of Jordan. Among these were the two sons of the aged Simeon who had blessed the infant

Saviour in the Temple, and they, it was said, could render an account of the miraculous occurrence. The risen men, Leucius and Carinus, were found by the Jews sitting in their house at Arimathæa. Adjured to speak, they made the sign of the cross on their tongues, and beckoned for writing materials. They were then placed in separate rooms, where they completed their narratives at the same moment; and these, on being compared, proved to be word for word alike.[1] The text of this Gospel, constructed with great ingenuity from Messianic verses in the Psalms and the Prophets, describes, in a style often powerful and poetical, the state of the departed spirits imprisoned in hell under the guardianship of Satan, Hades, and Beelzebub, whose discourses concerning the Crucifixion are reported. It relates how a great light was seen approaching, and how the summons was heard at the entrance of hell: "Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in"; how in spite of the resistance of Satan and his peers, the Saviour entered and released the spirits of the Patriarchs and the Prophets, together with a multitude of others, including the writers of the narrative. This Gospel deeply impressed the imagination of the Middle Ages, and became the foundation of numerous poems and dramas, from the days of Cædmon to those of Langland and the authors of the York, Towneley, Chester, and Coventry Mysteries. Later stories, told by saints who had passed into hell, reflect the vividness with which the imagination in the early and middle ages of Christianity supplied a substitute for the silence of revelation in legends about the unseen world. Such is the tale told by Gregory the Great to Peter the Archdeacon concerning Stephen; the spiritual experiences of Alberic of Monte Casino; the vision of Drihthelm related by Bede; the narrative of St. Patrick's passage into Purgatory, and of the voyage of St. Brandan; not to mention the more profane

[1] There are considerable variations in the narrative of the events which led to the composition of the second part of the Gospel of Nicodemus, as recorded in the Greek and Latin versions of the Gospel. I have followed the second Latin version, which is, on the whole, the most striking

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[1] There are considerable variations in the narrative of the events which led to the composition of the second part of the Gospel of Nicodemus, as recorded in the Greek and Latin versions of the Gospel. I have followed the second Latin version, which is, on the whole, the most striking.

Fabliau of the troubadour who, entering hell, played at dice with the devil for certain souls. All the elements, grand, terrible, and grotesque in these "Descents" are summed up in Dante's *Inferno*.

The substitution in mythology of dualism for polytheism tended, of course, greatly to restrict the number of the supernatural personages in poetry, where, however, the vacant room was to some extent filled by a new class of spiritual agents, namely, allegorical characters. When Jupiter, Minerva, Venus, and Mars, with all the rest of the deities of Olympus disappeared, mediæval verse began to swarm with abstractions such as Love, Eld, Nature, Genius, Danger, Jealousy, the Seven Deadly Sins, all of them the numerous offspring of Allegory. As I shall have occasion hereafter to consider the causes that led to the growth of Allegorical Poetry, it will be sufficient to say here that supernatural agency of this kind finds no place in the Greek epic or drama, being indeed fundamentally opposed to the Greek conception of Nature. It derives its origin partly from the first principles of the Platonic philosophy, partly from the union of these principles with the allegorical interpretation of Scripture first effected by Philo Judæus, and partly from the frequency with which the Latin poets, following the genius of their race, introduced abstract persons into their verse. The first poetical product of these various conspiring causes was the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius. A new literary precedent was thus formed, and a further impulse was given to allegorical composition, by the great popularity of two works in which abstract personages were introduced as agents: Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, a favourite text-book of morality in the Christian schools, and Martianus Capella's *Marriage of Mercury with Philology*, a treatise which sought to enliven by a connected fiction the exceedingly dry course of encyclopædic education. When the first attempts were made to compose metrically in the vulgar tongues of Europe, these were the models to which the poets naturally turned. A description of the allegorical characters of the *De Consolatione Philosophiæ* is found in the

poem on Boethius, the oldest surviving monument of French poetry, composed perhaps in the tenth century; while the influence both of Boethius and of Martianus Capella, transmitted through the *De Planctu Naturæ* and the *Anticlaudianus* of Alanus de Insulis, is distinctly visible in the numerous abstract agents in *The Romance of the Rose.*

(2) The gradual literary evolution, which we have now traced through the supernatural side of mediæval mythology, has its exact counterpart in the history of the growth of mediæval legend. Greek heroic fable, like the Greek religion, is the offspring of the Greek mind; but the great cycles of fiction which lie at the root of European poetry are the product of a course of transformation marked by three main stages: first, the decay in the Roman Empire of philosophical history; secondly, the replacement of the civil type of history by the ecclesiastical chronicle; thirdly, the union between the ecclesiastical chronicle and the principle of romance.

When we endeavour to form in our imaginations an idea of social and intellectual life in the latter days of the Roman Empire, as described in the first section of this chapter, we see at once that it must have borne a certain resemblance to the democratic conditions under which we ourselves live. Then, as now, the inhabitants of Europe recognised a common code of civilisation, forming them into one society in respect of certain moral usages and sentiments; so that a man who could speak both Greek and Latin would have found as little inconvenience in settling in any part of the Roman Empire, as an Englishman who, with a knowledge of the language, should choose to make his home in Germany or Italy. Moreover, in both societies we observe the great power of the principle of equality, and as "under the Empire" all distinctions of country or language tended to merge themselves in the larger idea of Roman citizenship, so now it is not uncommon, especially among men of a scientific turn of thought, to disregard the barriers of nationality in view of the unity of the human race In the Roman Empire, as in democratic Europe, the desire

of extracting the greatest amount of material enjoyment from the present moment was one of the most powerful of human motives; and the love of novelty and change threatens in our own day to destroy all traditional standards in art, literature, and morals, just as it destroyed them in the city states of Greece and Rome.

But, while in these respects there is much resemblance between the civilisation of the Roman Empire and that of modern Europe, they differ in one essential principle, namely, that Peace, formerly preserved by the predominance of one imperial power, now depends upon the balanced interests of rival nations. The principles of national independence and of civil liberty, therefore, combine to check the operation of the principle of individual equality in the historic societies of Europe, in a manner unknown under the Roman Empire. Though the forces of steam and electricity gratify the passion of the modern Quidnunc for hearing and learning "some new thing," to an extent which would have excited the envy of the citizen of Athens; and though, in consequence, the art of journalism promises to absorb many of the functions of the older forms of literature; still, so long as each individual feels that his own enjoyment of life is largely dependent on the place held by his country in the councils of Europe, history, poetry, and ethical philosophy will continue to appeal to the human imagination. In the imperial civilisation of Rome no such preservative existed. When the liberties of all individual states sank under the predominance of one protecting power, every motive for individual exertion disappeared. The members of each community with languid indifference watched their freedom being transferred from the keeping of one imperial master to another. No breath of honourable political ambition, no patriotic memory of the past, stirred the sluggish surface of their lives. Even their commercial fortunes were reared on the basis of slavery. Imagination ceased to discharge its nobler functions. It occupied itself with the daily gossip of the bath, with the depraved scandal of society, at best with the excitement of litig

tion; the rope-dancer, the gladiator, and the reciter dispelled for a moment the *ennui* of minds too inert to feel an interest in the ideal action of the drama.

The stages of this torpid degeneration in Roman taste are reflected in the decline of history. What had moved the imagination of the older school of Greek and Roman historians was the fortune of their several states, whether they wrote like Livy in the temper of patriots and poets, like Tacitus as moralists, or like Thucydides as philosophers. The cosmopolitan Roman, in the decline of the Empire, had no sympathy with these political motives. His main desire in life was to be amused. Amusement might be extracted from the personal side of history, hence a new species of history, dating from Suetonius, arose, which occupied itself with comparatively recent events and biographical gossip, and seems to have reached the depths of degeneracy in the *Scriptores Historiæ Augustæ* under Diocletian. Another class of readers regarded history as a branch of encyclopædic culture, and wished to extend their information with as little mental exertion as possible; their tastes were gratified with a multitude of handbooks and abridgments, like that composed by Florus, who wrote under Trajan, or the abstract of Eutropius which, composed in the reign of Valens, is still used in the lower forms of English public schools.

The destruction of the older type of civil history was completed by a vigorous antagonistic force to which I have already incidentally alluded. The *Chronicles* of the Christian historians Eusebius and Jerome were written with the deliberate purpose of superseding the records of Hellenic culture. The object of the *General Chronology* of the former was to show that the books of Moses claimed a higher antiquity than any writings of the Greeks; while the character of St. Jerome's *Chronicle* may be inferred from his own description. He tells us that from Ninus and Abraham to the capture of Troy his work is a strict translation of the *Chronicle* of Eusebius from Troy to the twentieth year of Constantine's reign the meagreness of the narrative is only relieved by a few

personal details mainly taken from the *Lives of the Cæsars* by Suetonius.

When the barbarians broke through the barriers of the Roman Empire, they doubtless brought with them many memories of their own past, enshrined in such songs and poems as those of the Franks, which Charlemagne, according to his biographer, was anxious to preserve in a collected form. These were soon dissolved by the superior charms of Latin civilisation. In their place the barbarians accepted the written accounts of the history of the world provided by the Church for their instruction, and ten centuries added but little to the ideas of civilisation they acquired from their first teachers. As we have already seen from Alcuin's metrical catalogue of the contents of the library at York, the Church did not include the works of the Roman historians among the subjects which she deemed worthy of study. Dante, profoundly skilled in all the secular and theological knowledge of his time, shows, in his *De Monarchiâ*, that his knowledge of the course of the world is mainly derived from the *Chronicles* of Orosius and Jerome, with such imaginative colouring as might be added from the various interpretations of the prophecy of Daniel. As for Chaucer, a good astronomer according to his lights, a diligent student of the science of the schools, a competent Latin scholar, a master of two modern languages besides his own, the extent of his historical knowledge may be inferred from "The Man of Law's Tale." Here we find an emperor reigning in Rome contemporaneously with a sultan of Syria, upon whom the Emperor bestows the hand of his daughter without the slightest reluctance; while the lady herself, the heroine of many adventures, is afterwards married to Alla, a king of Northumberland, by whom she becomes the mother of Maurice, presumably Emperor of the East, A.D. 582-602!

But though the barbarous nations accepted with reverence the histories of the past which were presented to them on the authority of the Church, they did not refrain from expanding and vivifying the lifeless narrative of the *Chronicles* with their own poetic invention; and this

tendency was much encouraged by the uncritical spirit in which their ecclesiastical teachers examined the nature of the historical evidence on which they relied. Even before the fall of the Empire the intellectual indolence of the times had provided great opportunities for the forger. From the fourth century downwards narratives began to appear professing to be records by eye-witnesses of the most celebrated events in the history of mankind. These were gradually combined by the monastic historians—always disposed to welcome the marvellous—with the bare abstracts of the *Chronicles*.[1] When the northern minstrels and trouvères began to make use of the vulgar tongues as literary instruments, their dramatic fancy wove the decomposed images of the antique world into a new web of thought, embodying their own still barbarous conceptions of nature and society. The result remains in the four great cycles of legend which lie at the base of modern European poetry:—(1) The history of the Trojan War; (2) The history of Alexander; (3) The history of Charlemagne; (4) The history of King Arthur. Nothing can afford a better illustration of the argument of this chapter than the gradual manner in which these histories were composed.

To begin with the Trojan War. In the fourth century a languid excitement was aroused by the report of the appearance of a new and original history. The MS., it was said, had been found in the time of Nero, in the tomb of Dictys of Crete, which had been uncovered by an earthquake. It was written in the Greek language, but in Phœnician characters, and proved to be a narrative of the Trojan War by Dictys the Cretan, the companion of Idomeneus, mentioned in the *Iliad*. This precious document,

[1] Isidore of Seville believed the history of Dares the Phrygian to be perfectly genuine. He says: "Historiam primam apud nos Moyses . . apud Gentiles vero *primus* Dares Phrygius de Græcis et Trojanis historiam edidit."—Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, i. 42 (Migne, 82, p. 122). The great particularity of Dares seems to have impressed the imagination of his readers. In the Life of Cyriacus in the *Acta Sanctorum*, Helena relies on this as an argument to convince a sceptic that the events of remote antiquity may be accurately reported. See Kemble's Introduction to the *Poetry of the Codex Vercellensis*, Part ii. p. iv.

it seems, having been transcribed into Greek, had been sent to Rome as a present to Nero, and was now translated into Latin by one Septimius. It never rains but it pours. In course of time it appeared that the Trojans too had had their contemporary historian, Dares the Phrygian, who had also left a MS. which had been discovered some hundreds of years before at Athens by Cornelius Nepos. Nepos, for reasons known only to himself, had refrained from publishing this literary curiosity, and contented himself with turning it into Latin. The two literary heroes, and particularly Dares, threw a flood of light on a number of details omitted by Homer. Readers of the *Iliad* were informed of the exact duration of each truce mentioned in it, and might please their imagination with the portraits of four-and-twenty of the chiefs on each side. The descriptions of the women were particularly minute, mention being made of the mole between Helen's eyebrows,[1] and of the colour of Cassandra's hair,[2] while Polyxena, according to the historian, inspired admiration by her long neck, slender fingers, and straight legs.[3] The number of the slain in both armies was accurately recorded, 886,000 having fallen on the side of the Greeks, and 676,000 Trojans.[4] But what appeared most plainly to set the stamp of authenticity on the two narratives was the complete silence of both authors as to the intervention of the gods. The Teutonic poets seized with joy on materials for their art far more rich and various than any preserved in their own cycles of oral tradition. In the reign of Henry II. of England the trouvère Benoît de Ste. More founded on the histories of Dictys and Dares his metrical *Roman de Troye*, and combined with the story the tale of the Theban and Argonautic expeditions, with many improvements of his own. His poem afforded a ground-work for the prose chronicle of Guido delle Colonne, *Historia de Bello Trojano*, which breathed into the narrative the full spirit of chivalry.

[1] "Notam inter duo supercilia habentem."—*De Excidio Trojæ Historia*, c. 12.
[2] "Rufam," *Ibid.* c. 12.
[3] "Collo longo . . . digitis prolixis, cruribus rectis."—*Ibid.* c. 12.
[4] *Ibid.* c. 44.

Guido's History became the basis for another metrical version, *Les cent histoires de Troye en rime*, a composition of the fourteenth century, and this long tidal movement of verse and prose was completed by Caxton's *Recueyl des histoires de Troye*, one of the earliest productions of the English press. Such were the fruits of the forgery whose author is celebrated by Chaucer in the *House of Fame* as bearing up one of the great pillars of history, and as exciting the envy of Homer.[1]

The romance of Alexander rests upon a somewhat different foundation. There was indeed something romantic in the actual history and character of the hero who established the powerful Macedonian Monarchy, and carried the conquests of Greek culture and discipline far back into the primitive Asiatic home of the race. A modern poet might find ample materials for epical treatment in Plutarch's Life of Alexander, or in the serious narrative of Q. Curtius. But not such was the history that pleased the imagination of the Middle Ages Long after the real significance of Alexander's expedition had faded before the conquering arms of the Romans, a record appeared investing his adventures with all the colours of magic and mythology. To the eye of reason it carried on the surface the hall-mark of forgery. Pretending to be the work of Callisthenes, the contemporary and friend of Alexander, it seemed to offer a still stronger guarantee of authenticity in the shape of letters from Alexander to Aristotle and others. But the entire superstructure raised upon this specious basis of reality was wildly fabulous. The hero himself was represented as being the son of Nectanebus, an enchanter; he visited the scene of the Earthly Paradise; he wrote letters to Indian Brahmins; the adventures in which he engaged

[1] But yet I gan full well espie
Between hem was a litel envie
One said that Omer made lies,
Feyning in his poetries,
And was to the Greekis favorable,
Therefore held he it but fable

Chaucer, *House of Fame*, Book III.

resembled those of the *Arabian Nights.* The date of this composition in Greek is uncertain, but it was translated into Latin by Julius Valerius not later than the fourth century of our era. In its new and grave Latin dress the history seems to have been too long for the readers of that indolent age; it was at any rate soon reduced to an *Epitome*, which long survived as a popular text-book. In the eleventh century Leo, "the archpresbyter," holding a commission from the Dukes of Campania, made a fresh translation of the Greek original, which was more fortunate in catching the public taste. The subject in its "historic" dress was ready-made for the art of the trouvère, and all that remained was to clothe it in a chivalrous garb. This task was soon performed. The first to attempt it was Alberic de Besançon, who, in 1150 A.D., treated the history in the Romance dialect, and in verses of ten syllables. Only 105 lines of his poem survive, and it may be doubted whether he was acquainted with more than the epitome of Julius Valerius' translation. He appears to have been anxious to preserve the knightly ideal in the portrait of Alexander, and indignantly refutes the calumny, founded on the Greek original, that the king was the son of an enchanter. Alberic's successors were less of precisians on this nice point. Lambert le Tort and Alexander of Paris seized with eagerness on all the marvels retailed by the false Callisthenes, and preserved in the translation of Leo, *De Prœliis Alexandri.* The romance of Alexander in their hands swelled into some 30,000 verses of twelve syllables, from which the Alexandrine measure derived its name; and the poets were careful to assign to their Greek hero the virtues that would most commend him to their readers, namely, knight-errantry and liberality in the distribution of fiefs among his followers.[1]

Charlemagne was a figure, historically not less great

[1] A very full and minute account of this cycle of romance and its sources is given in M. Paul Meyer's *Alexandre le Grand dans la littérature française du moyen âge.* Paris, 1886.

and interesting than Alexander, and, like Alexander, he had found a sober and faithful biographer in the person of his secretary, Eginhard. On the other hand, like every famous Teutonic chieftain, he had his *sacer vates*, whose business it was to present an image of his lord in the colossal proportions required by poetry, and whose songs, spreading among the people and receiving improvements from generations of minstrels, acquired, after the manner of Virgil's Rumour, "strength on their journey." In the middle of the twelfth century a monk of the convent of St. James at Compostella in Spain, finding that some of these poetical traditions connected the hero with his own monastery, turned them into prosaic history, for the greater glory of his patron saint. The times were now ready for the appearance of the inevitable forger, and the slender beginnings of the monk of Compostella were soon incorporated in a romantic history, with a preface, professing the work to be the narrative of Turpin, or Tilpin, Archbishop of Rheims, in 745-800 A.D. As this archbishop was a contemporary of Charlemagne, and was reported to have shared in his warlike adventures, the highest authority attached to a record which was, in reality, an ingenious compound of the true history of Charlemagne, many of the actions related of Charles Martel, and the poetical legends which had accumulated round the memory of the emperor and other famous chieftains. The whole history was enlivened by a mixture of angelic and diabolic machinery, capable of gratifying the largest appetite for the marvellous The Italian poets, who in the sixteenth century took up the legend of Charlemagne, were greatly delighted with the gravity and apparent authenticity of this and other fabulous narratives which grew out of it; and whenever Ariosto seeks to burlesque the mediæval genius with a more than usually extravagant creation of his own fancy, he professes to be transcribing literally from the work of *Turpino*.[1]

[1] The chief authorities on this subject are Gaston Paris, *De Pseudo Turpino*, Paris, 1865; and R. Dozy, *Recherches sur l'histoire de la lit. de l'Espagne pendant le moyen âge*, Paris, 1881.

Charlemagne and Alexander were at least historical figures, but Arthur, who forms the centre of the most splendid and extensive romance of the Middle Ages, was little more than a historical name. Here, too, just as in the two cycles of legend which have been mentioned above, we find a contrast between serious history and fabulous chronicle. Bede and Gildas cover much of the same ground as Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniæ,* and their silence with regard to the wonderful events recorded by the latter has led to the suspicion that Geoffrey evolved his history out of his own imagination. In reality that ingenious writer did no more than put the finishing strokes of style and fancy to a mass of legend which had been long accumulating. The starting point of the Arthurian myth is a history composed by some patriotic Celt of the ninth century, whose object was to represent, in colours favourable to the Britons, the struggle for existence between his countrymen and the Saxon invaders. His narrative contains the germ of Geoffrey's romantic history in an account of the origin of the Britons, the tale of the wonderful child Merlin who prophesied to Vortigern, and the story of the later fortunes of the Britons to the time of Arthur. He observes that various accounts are given of the first ancestor of the race, who, according to one story, was Brutus, a grandson of Æneas, and (strange to say) a Roman consul, and, according to another, Brito, who was of the house and lineage of Japhet. A third genealogy endeavoured to bridge over this inconsistency by taking Brutus as the founder of the line, and connecting him with Noah through the family of Anchises! The historian gives, from Bede and Jerome, but with extraordinary inaccuracy, an account of the occupation of Britain by the Romans, and estimates the interval of time between the composition of his history and the first arrival of the Saxons, and also between the opening of the Christian era and the mission of St. Patrick. Successive copyists of this MS., finding difficulties in the author's chronology, improved the history in the way that each thought best. One of them while

professing to be merely a transcriber, added to the history a prologue, which assigned the authorship to a certain Nennius; they also inserted a table of chronological calculations (*Calculi*); a genealogy of the Saxon kings; and a chapter of marvels (*Mirabilia*) connected with the general subject.

Such was the foundation on which Geoffrey of Monmouth undoubtedly built his own superstructure. Geoffrey himself speaks of another book written in the British tongue, brought to him, as he says, *out of Britain*, by Walter Calenius, Archdeacon of Oxford, from which he derived many of the materials for his own history. By "Britain" it was long supposed that Geoffrey meant Brittany; and the mysterious authority in the Celtic language was supposed to be an elaborate fiction. Recent research, however, has proved beyond doubt the existence of a *History of Britain* quite distinct from Nennius' *History of the Britons*, and there appears to be some ground for believing that the "Britannia," from which the Archdeacon of Oxford is said to have brought the book, was merely Wales (*i.e.* the part of England occupied by the Britons). It is possible that this History, containing a collection of legends about the British kings in the Celtic language, suggested to Geoffrey at least the groundwork of the lively fable with which he has surrounded the memory of Arthur. This much is certain that, in striking contrast with the history of Nennius, which represents Arthur as struggling with doubtful success against the Saxon invasion, the *History of Britain* carries him abroad as the conqueror of Gaul.[1] After a feat commemorated on such high authority, it was but a short flight of invention on Geoffrey's part—even if he found no warrant in his original—to the lofty fiction, which makes Arthur overthrow the Roman Emperor in a great battle and assume the imperial crown. From the small beginnings of Nennius, thus expanded into the History of Geoffrey of Monmouth, rose the vast romantic fabric of the History of King Arthur, which finally comprised the Holy Grail, the

[1] See the work referred to in note 1 on the following page.

Story of Merlin, Lancelot du Lac, the Quest of the Holy Grail, the Morte d'Arthur, and the Romance of Tristram.[1]

The reader will not fail to observe in all these instances an evolution of thought closely resembling that by which the Schoolmen transmitted to modern Europe the culture of the pagan world. As in the sphere of science the Church converted the seven liberal arts to the service of theology, so in the sphere of history the fancy of the barbarians is seen digesting and reconstructing the decomposed matter of ancient civilisation. Strangely varied is the intellectual drama by which the work of transmutation is effected—the *ennui* of Greek and Roman, who have lost all interest in the glorious records of their past liberty; the Christian zeal, which seeks to obliterate these records in favour of the scriptural account of the history of mankind; the child-like curiosity of the Gothic tribesman, speculating on the nature of an unknown past. The joint product of these co-operating forces is a Mythology, presenting a new conception of man and nature, but embodying at the same time detached images of ancient history and religion, distinct as the indications of primeval foliage preserved in the depths of the coal-mine.

IV. Turning from mythology to poetry, from the matter of art to its form and spirit, we find ourselves still in the presence of a great but gradual movement of conversion. The continuity of life, in the sphere of thought and language, between the decay of the Roman Empire and the rise of mediæval Europe, is demonstrable; but the process of transformation is of that secret kind, which can be followed only by a sustained effort of reason and imagination. For, at first sight, there appears to be an unbridged gulf between the earliest examples of European poetry and the surviving monuments of Latin poetry, on the one hand, and of Teutonic minstrelsy, on the other. If we look at the spirit pervading the work of the later Latin poets like Prudentius, Sedulius, and Prosper, we

[1] A careful study of the sources of Geoffrey's History is made in *L'Historia Britonum attribuée à Nennius*. By M. Arthur De La Borderie. Paris, London, 1883.

find that it retains, in a feeble measure, an air of civil refinement inherited from the traditions of Virgil. In a poem like *Beowulf*, on the contrary, the product of oral minstrelsy, there still breathes the temper of the tribesman, rejoicing in the freedom of the steppe, the forest, and the mountain. Both in manner are as unlike as possible the poetry of the troubadours and of Dante. If again we look at these various examples of the art of poetry on their technical side, we find that they are all constructed on distinct and opposite metrical principles; the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, for instance, being based on the principle of quantity, *Beowulf* on the principle of alliteration, and the *Divine Comedy* on the principle of accent, syllabic measurement, and rhyme.

When, however, we examine the matter a little closer, we observe that between the author of the *Song of Beowulf* and the troubadours there is at least one link of connection, namely, that both parties make use of the same instrument, minstrelsy; while Dante is in touch with the Latin Christian poets, in respect of his subject and of a scholastic training, inherited, as has been already shown, from the Roman Empire. Moreover, strange as it seems, it can be proved that, while the alliterative measure, which regulated the minstrelsy of the barbarians, sank gradually into disuse after the Teutonic races came into contact with Latin civilisation, some of the Latin metres, based entirely on the principle of quantity, were transmuted, by simple decomposition, into metres still used in European poetry, and dependent on accent, syllabic measurement, and rhyme. Thus the path of development lies, in one direction, through the conversion of the Teutonic scop into the French trouvère and troubadour, in another, through the change of Latin into the Romance languages and metres; while this inward process is still further modified by the influence of feudal institutions, scholastic logic, and Oriental culture.

Unmistakable traces of the main transformation have been left on the surface of language. When the spirit of minstrelsy begins to pass into a literary form, the genius

of the *Scôp* (maker), dominated by Latin associations, barely disguises itself under such names as *Trouvère* and *Troubadour* (Trovator); the *Gleeman* becomes the *Jongleur* (joculator); while the simple Teutonic *lied* or lay branches into such various kinds of epic composition as the *dit* (dicere), the *fabliau* (fabula), the *roman* (romanus), and such lyrical varieties, as the *ballad* (balla), the *sonnet* (sonare), the *chanson* or *canzone* (canere).

Teutonic, as well as Celtic, poetry is, in its origin, an embodiment of the imagination of the Tribe, not of the State; and even after the conversion of the Germans to Christianity and their experience of Roman civilisation, it retained much of its primitive character. Though the art of minstrelsy was known at a very early period to the Aryan races, yet among the pastoral peoples, at any rate, it must have remained for generations, probably for centuries, without capacity for development. When the westward exodus began the life of these peoples would have been entirely nomadic; and, even at the semi-agricultural stage they have reached in the descriptions of Cæsar and Tacitus, they are still without cities. Societies of this kind may, within a limited range, cultivate epic and lyrical poetry, but they do not feel the need of the drama, and philosophical conceptions of nature are of course beyond their reach. Age after age of poets repeats the stories by which the tribe accounts for the order of all things in earth and heaven; traces the descent of its chieftains from the gods; praises the valour of its victorious leaders; laments over its heroes fallen in battle; and satirises the character of those who have shown themselves backward in war. There is nothing to change the current of ideas, and the art of the individual poet can only be shown by devising variations of the primeval type.

But when the barbarians became the masters of the Roman Empire, this old equipment of thought was at once felt to be inadequate to their needs. In the first place, the tide of migration ceased, and provision had to be made for the various necessities of settled government.

The conquerors for the first time became acquainted with the life of cities, which, however degraded might be the spirit of the inhabitants, still preserved the monuments of ancient splendour and refinement. As nation after nation was converted to Christianity, it looked up with reverence to men who, though speaking the language of a conquered race, were the apostles of a victorious religion. In the Latin language, too, the barbarians found a treasure house of literature, art, and philosophy, which seemed to open out a boundless prospect to their fresh and ardent imaginations.

There is, of course, no positive evidence to show when the character of barbarian minstrelsy began to change, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that the art would have received a fresh development from the influences that met and mingled in the genius of Charlemagne. The biographer of that great conqueror depicts him at one time as the successor of the Cæsars and the protector of the Latin Church, listening in person to suits in the law-courts, or attending to the instructions of Alcuin; at another time as the German tribesman interested in the preservation of the oral traditions of Frankish poetry.[1] It was fitting that a hero of this kind should live as the last great figure of Teutonic epic song. Under his feeble descendants his empire gradually broke up into numerous divisions, themselves constantly subdivided: the principality, the duchy, the county, once held as a *beneficium* from the monarch, became the legal inheritance of the vassal; the allod changed into the fief; the martial *comitatus* settled down into the local court; and the customs of the people, while remaining barbarous, were no longer nomadic. The Frankish scop must, under these altered circumstances, have been deprived of many of the primitive motives of song. His very language was lost in the speech of the race he had conquered. His mythical traditions were distasteful to the Church of which he had become a member. He could no longer celebrate the leaders of great tribal armies for

[1] Eginhardus, *Vita et Gesta Caroli Magni*, c. 25, 29

ever on the march, but sank into the mere dependant of a lord, whose *ennui*, increasing as his powers of motion were circumscribed, required to be relieved by every variety of entertainment. To satisfy the pettier but more exacting tastes of his audience, the lofty bard by degrees stooped to eke out his minstrelsy with the tricks of inferior professions, and to amuse the inhabitants of the castle with all those varieties of juggling, jesting, and pantomime, which came to be associated with the art of the *joculator* or *jongleur*.[1]

This decline in the spirit of minstrelsy led to a great variety of style in metrical composition. Some of the primeval motives survived in a degenerate form. The vanity of the prince or duke still sought gratification in tracing his descent to some hero of tradition, particularly Charlemagne and his *comitatus*; hence the oldest form of mediæval European poetry is the *Chanson de Geste*, an example of which survives in the *Chant de Roland*, which the minstrel Taillefer is said to have sung in the Norman ranks at the battle of Hastings.[2] These poems are invariably composed in verses of five accents and ten syllables, and were doubtless accompanied by the harp or viol of the singer. In later days the oral *Chant* expanded into the literary *Roman*. As the gleeman had been transformed into the *jongleur*, so out of the latter was developed a new species, the *trouvère* or inventor, whose genius, stimulated by the Crusades, revived something of the ancient tribal nomadic spirit, and the taste for legendary marvel. The *Roman*, originally employed, like the *Chanson de Geste*, as an historical instrument for preserving the memory of national heroes (a specimen is still extant in the *Roman de Rou*), was gradually changed by the *trouvère* into the

[1] A fuller account of the gradual decay of the minstrel's profession, and of the transformation of oral into written poetry, is given in Chapter XI.

[2] Taillefer qui moult bien chantoit
Sor un cheval qui tost aloit,
Devant le duc aloit chantant
De Karlemaigne et de Rollant,
Et d'Oliver et des vassals
Qi morurent en Rencevals.

Wace, *Roman de Rou*, 8035.

literary vehicle for those gigantic legendary fictions in verse or prose about Charlemagne, Arthur, and Alexander, the genesis of which has been already described.

At the same time, as the Romance languages began to be written as well as spoken, a taste for shorter compositions rapidly spread, and the *jongleur* or *trouvère* found his account in composing, in a more polished style, short tales variously classified as *lai*, *dit*, or *fabliau*. The different names of these poems do not always denote a settled distinction in their matter, for though the *lai*, as the Celtic and Teutonic affinities of the word suggest, usually embodies some wild conception of folk lore, yet it sometimes covers the same ground as the *fabliau*; while the *dit* is the description given to almost any kind of short story. A more specific meaning generally attaches to the name *fabliau*, a form of poem used, as a rule, for the preservation of those popular tales, which from time immemorial had circulated among nations of Indo-European descent, and of which the *Milesian Tales*, so agreeable to the taste of the Greeks and Romans, were doubtless prototypes. The *fabliaux* were for the most part narratives of comic adventures and clever tricks, practised especially by women; or scandalous anecdotes, in which the chief actors in mediæval times were monks and priests Little skill was required to reproduce these venerable, but always welcome stories, in a metrical form, and the appropriation of the *fabliau* by the *trouvère* marked the final stage in the decline of minstrelsy. Petrarch, who tells us that *jongleurs* occasionally came to ask him for poetical assistance, says of them: "You will find in them more of memory than invention, and more effrontery than memory. As they live at the expense of others, they learn by heart verses in the vulgar tongue, and repeat them with much gesticulation before the rich and noble, from whom they receive in return money, clothes, and presents."[1] The *fabliau* is, in fact, the offspring of the primitive genius of the tribesmen brought into contact with city life; it is the germ from which in future will be developed many of the most famous produc-

[1] Petrarch, *Epist. Senil.* v 3.

tions of European fiction: the *Decameron*, the *Canterbury Tales*, the most characteristic portions of the *Orlando Furioso, Don Quixote*, the plays of Molière, the fables of La Fontaine, the novels of Smollett.

While on its epic side the art of oral minstrelsy thus degenerated, a new impulse was given to it on the lyrical side by the growth of feudalism. The troubadour was as plainly the poet of the feudal aristocracy, as the *jongleur*, with his *fabliau*, was the poet of the bourgeois of the city. During the decentralising period after the death of Charlemagne, each local independent court formed an isolated society in the midst of a subject population, and the code of manners in this *comitatus* was founded on some of the primitive instincts of the German tribe, one of which was the peculiar honour paid to women. Within the walls of the fortified castle the influence of woman soon became paramount, and, associating itself with the usages of chivalry and the adoration of the Virgin, framed for the Teutonic aristocracy a network of unwritten laws to regulate the intercourse of the sexes. Out of this condition of things arose the famous institution of the Courts of Love, as to the effects of which on the course of mediæval poetry much will have to be said hereafter. For the present it is sufficient to observe that the art of the troubadours, generated as it was in an esoteric atmosphere, never rooted itself in the popular soil; the poetical dialect it employed was addressed to the taste of the "précieuses" of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; and the methods of interpretation, which must be applied to the language and manners of the Hôtel Rambouillet, are also applicable—due allowance being made for different stages of civilisation—to the judgments on love and poetry pronounced in the castle of the Countess of Champagne.

The poetry of the troubadours did not arrest the decline of minstrelsy, but brought it into alliance with scholastic literature. On the one hand the comparatively settled condition and growing refinement of society deprived the scop of many of his ancient themes; on the other, the Teutonic intellect, coming under the influence

of an old civilisation, began to aim at new artistic ideals. The infant literature of every existing European nation which contains a Latin element reflects vividly the genius of the schools. Sometimes the effect of the encyclopædic training of the time shows itself in the inordinate passion of the poet for displaying his learning, at the expense of taste and judgment. If Chaucer has occasion to mention a forest, he does not rest till he has enumerated all the different kinds of trees that grew in it, and the various purposes for which they were used.[1] In his *House of Fame* he tells us that the temple of Venus, in which he happened to find himself, was ornamented with paintings representing scenes in the life of Æneas, but instead of resting content—like Virgil when describing the pictures in Carthage—with two or three vivid touches, he gives an abstract of the *Æneid* up to the death of Dido.[2] John de Meung, having introduced into the *Romaunt of the Rose* an invective against Love, diverges into the praises of old age, merely for the purpose of showing his readers that he is acquainted with all that Cicero says on the subject in his treatise *De Senectute*.[3]

A still more characteristic feature of mediæval poetry is its reproduction of the scholastic logic. For a long period, as has been already remarked, the Latin Church looked with suspicion on Logic as a profane art, which aspired to intrude presumptuously into regions reserved for the privileged eye of Faith. Even when Scotus Erigena employed dialectic as a weapon against the heterodoxy of Gotschalk, his intervention was regarded with alarm, almost with abhorrence; and it was not till the great dispute arose on the nature of Universals, that the Church perceived the necessity of defending her dogmas with systematic reasoning. From that time forward logic became the most important of all the seven sciences in the academical course, and the work of confirming faith by the methods of reason was carried on till it reached its highest perfection in the hands of St. Thomas Aquinas.

[1] See *Parlement of Foules*, 183. [2] *House of Fame*, Book i 140-467.
[3] See *Roman de la Rose*, v. 4444.

This spirit, naturally communicating itself to those who practised the arts of rhetoric and poetry, gave birth to new forms of metrical composition. Throughout the thirteenth century numerous poems were produced, imitating the form of the scholastic debate, in which two opposing reasoners advanced arguments on each side of a question, and contended till the dispute was determined by a logical conclusion. Among others the following subjects are discussed: "De la Disputacyon de la Sinagogue et de la Sainte Eglise"; "Debat entre un Juif et un Chrétien"; "Marguet" (being a debate between a young woman and an old man); "Bataille d'Enfer et de Paradis."[1] Logic invaded even the poetry of the troubadours and the Courts of Love, where abstruse and subtle questions of the greatest delicacy were argued in the most precise syllogistic form. One class of Provençal poetry derived its name from this fashion. "In the gallant manners of chivalry," says Raynouard, "and in the intellectual entertainments of the troubadours, distinction was obtained by a talent for maintaining and defending delicate and controverted questions, usually relating to love; the work in which the poets thus displayed the refinement and subtlety of their wit was called *Tenson* from the Latin *contentionem, dispute, debat;* we read in the Count of Poitiers: "And if you propose to me a game of love, I am not such a fool as not to choose the better side of the argument."[2]

The most splendid fruits of the scholastic education are seen in the writings of Dante. Of the effects of the schools on his prose style it is superfluous to speak. Whether he is expounding the divine origin of monarchy, or explaining the form of his sonnets, his logical training shows itself in the connected chain of proofs by which he reaches every conclusion. But the same spirit is no less visible in his poetry. In the whole system of thought out of which the *Divine Comedy* is composed, in the choice of the words, in the structure of the sentences, even in the severe harmony of the cadences, we feel the work of a

[1] *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, vol. xxiii. pp. 216-234.
[2] Raynouard, *Choix des Troubadours*, vol. ii. p. 84.

vast genius formed by the training of the Schoolmen. At one time Beatrice in the third heaven resolves the doubts of her pupil on some theological difficulty;[1] at another she furnishes him with a demonstration that the Church cannot dispense from the observation of monastic vows.[2] Saint Thomas Aquinas impresses on his mind the absolute necessity of logical methods in matters of faith. "And let this always be to thee as lead to thy feet to make thee move slowly, like a weary man, both to the 'yes' and the 'no' that thou dost not see; since low indeed is he among the fools who without distinction affirms and denies, alike in the one and the other pass; since he meets that which many times turns current opinions to the false side, and afterwards prejudice binds the intellect. Much more than in vain he quits the shore, since he does not return the same man as he set out, who fishes for the truth but has no skill."[3]

Chaucer, though he is of course far removed from Dante in subtlety of reasoning, furnishes a no less striking example of the influence exercised on poetry by the dialectical training of the schools. Writing in the spirit of a trouvère, he nevertheless delights to animate his stories with passages of debate. His pilgrims are as quarrelsome and argumentative as doctors of the university; his animals chop logic with each other and cite Plato and Aristotle; even his women abstain from exerting the privilege of their sex, and jumping to a conclusion. His poetical disputations imitate most faithfully the procedure of the schools. First the thesis is proposed; then comes

[1] Dante, *Paradiso*, vii. 52-148. [2] *Ibid.* v. 1-84.

[3] E questo ti sia sempre piombo ai piedi,
Per farti muover lento, com' uom lasso,
Ed al sì ed al nò che tu non vedi:
Chè quegli è tra gli stolti ben abbasso,
Che senza distinzion afferma e nega,
Così nell' un, come nell' altro passo
Perch' egl' incontra che più volte piega
[illegible]
. . .
Chi pesca per lo vero e non ha l' arte
Ibid. xiii. 112.

the appeal to authorities, and an enormous array of learning is advanced for and against the proposition. "Auctoritie" is a word of frequent occurrence in the *Canterbury Tales.* Thus says the Wife of Bath:—

Experience, though non authoritie
Were in this world, is right ynough for me
To speke of wo that is in marriage.

And in the same way the loathly Bride, in the Wife of Bath's Tale—

Now, sire, of elde that ye repreven me,
And, certes, sire, though non authoritie
Were in no book, ye gentiles of honour
Sain that men should an olde wight honour,
And clepe him fader for your gentillesse;
And auctors shall I finden as I gesse.

But it is not enough to cite authority; the argument itself must be marshalled with skill and precision; and a conclusion must be arrived at from premises correctly stated even in the midst of the most agitating circumstances. An admirable illustration of this love of formal logic is afforded by the tale from which the last extract is taken. A knight of King Arthur's court, being condemned to death, is reprieved at the intercession of the queen, on condition that he solves a riddle she proposes to him within a year. An old woman furnishes him with the answer, but exacts from him in return a promise that he will grant her any request she may make of him. When the time comes she demands that he shall marry her, and the knight abides by his word; but as she proceeds to claim all the privileges of a wife he betrays great distress. His wife asks him the reason, and he replies with more frankness than gallantry:—

Thou art so lothly and so old also,
And thereto comen of so low a kinde,
That litel wonder is though I walwe and wind:
So wolde God min herte wolde brest.

Thereupon—

"Is this," quod she, "the cause of your unrest?"
"Ye certainly," quod he, "no wonder is."
"Now, sire," quod she, "I coude amend all this"

But first she takes his proposition point by point, proving, in the first place, from the reasoning of Dante and the example of Tullus Hostilius [Servius Tullius], that lowness of birth is no bar to real nobility; in the second place, from Seneca and Juvenal, that poverty is not an evil; and in the third place, that there are certain advantages even in having an old and ugly wife. It must be admitted that the lady appears to have had some doubts of the efficacy of her logic, for at the close of her sermon she turns herself with great promptitude into a young and beautiful woman who has no difficulty in effecting the knight's conversion.

The evidence that has been presented tends to show that the motive power of Christian European poetry springs from the oral minstrelsy of the Teutonic and Scandinavian tribes; and that the framework or setting of imagination, derived from the institutions, customs, and tastes of the audience, is also Germanic. On the other hand, the spirit of oral minstrelsy is found to have been profoundly modified by contact with Latin civilisation; its old character is transformed by the new themes it borrows from Greek mythology and history, from Hindoo fable, and ecclesiastical legend; while the transition from oral to literary composition exhibits plainly the influence of the training of the Church. It still remains to inquire into the origin of the metrical forms and literary models adopted by the early poets of France and Italy, who gave the first examples of composition to the fathers of English verse. This will lead us to observe a most remarkable process of rhythmical transformation, effected by the forces partly of natural decay, partly of artistic reconstruction. We shall see how the artificial structure of classic Latin verse was undermined by an irresistible power inherent in the Latin language itself; how the ruins of the classic system were rendered available for use in the Romance languages; and how fresh metrical forms and moulds were

created for these languages by the imitation of models derived from the Arabs.

The first principles of Latin classic prosody were imported from Greece, and were naturalised by a succession of great Latin poets, almost in spite of the inherent tendencies of their own language. Hence all the established Latin, like all the Greek, metres were determined by the principle of quantity, which checked for a time the native energy of the Latin accent.[1] The quantity of syllables and the fall of the accent in the Greek language were both regulated by a scientific musical principle, the exact nature of which it is now impossible to discover. But in Latin the tonic accent, or stress of the voice, fell always on that part of the word which contained the stem, and its particular place was determined by the quantity of the penultimate syllable of the whole word. The accent, therefore, was a far more powerful factor in Latin prosody than in Greek, and constantly endangered the stability of the artificial metrical structure introduced by Ennius, which depended on the nice perception of the quantitative value of each individual syllable. Moreover, the musical ear of the Romans was not nearly so refined as that of the Greeks, and their consequent tendency to confuse distinctions of sound is shown in their early literature by the frequency with which words are contracted by the omission of syllables, or by the change of full-sounding into attenuated vowels. Thus in Plautus we often find, instead of the full forms *evasisti*, *dixisti*, *scripsistis*, *admisisse*, *advexisse*, the contractions *evasti*, *dixti*, *scripstis*, *admisse*, *advexe*; the vowel is absorbed in the middle of a word, as in *audacter*, *valde*, *imus*, the full form of which is *audaciter*, *valide*, *infimus*; in words derived from the Greek the open *a* is replaced by *e*, as in *camera*, *phaleræ*, *tessera*, *siserum*, derived from

[1] For the sake of the reader who is not acquainted with Latin and Greek, it may be advisable to say that in these languages every syllable was regarded as "short" (◡) or "long" (–); that one long syllable was equal to two short ones; that Latin and Greek metres were constructed by combination of different kinds of "feet" (*i.e.* a certain number of syllables of different quantity); and that the principal kinds of feet were the *dactyl* (– ◡ ◡), the *anapæst* (◡ ◡ –), the *spondee* (– –), the *iambus* (◡ –), and the *trochee* (– ◡).

καμάρα, φαλάρα, τέσσαρα, σίσαρον; and even in native Latin the full *u* is contracted into *i*, as in *optimus*, *manibus*, *maximus*, instead of the older *optumus*, *manubus*, *maxumus*, The general result was, that while the Romans were quick to catch the rhythm and cadence of a metrical movement, in so far as it was determined by the even distribution of the accent, they had much difficulty in understanding the rules of quantity, and though the great Latin poets of the Golden Age showed the most admirable skill in naturalising Greek metres, and in accommodating the language to the requirements of Greek prosody, yet, in the days of decline, their scientific principles were more and more neglected.

Of the metres imported from Greek literature those which established themselves most firmly in the Latin language were the hexameter, the iambic trimeter, and the trochaic tetrameter. The use of the hexameter, depending as it did on the combination of feet unequal in the number of their syllables, and therefore presenting difficulties in respect of quantity, was entirely confined to men of letters and education. On the other hand, the metres composed exclusively of iambuses and trochees, with a simple rhythmical movement, readily commended themselves to the ear of the people. The iambic metres were familiar to the audiences in the theatre; the more nimbly moving trochaic became a favourite in military and popular chants. In all alike, whether they were employed by the scholar or the crowd, the same tendency to disregard the laws of quantity is increasingly visible with the advance of time. It is easy to understand that artificial distinctions as to the natural quantity of simple vowels should soon have disappeared, and we need not be surprised to find a man of education like Prudentius introducing *Măthĕsis*[1] (μάθησις) into his verse as a word with the middle syllable short. But it is a conclusive proof of the power of the accent in determining Latin prosody that a scientific grammarian like Diomedes, writing in the fourth century after Christ,

[1] Prudentius, *Adversus Symmachum*, 2. 893 :—

Involvit mathesi, magicas impellit in artes.

should have come to regard the word *armatus* as an amphibrach, that is to say, a long central syllable, flanked by two short ones (⏑–⏑).[1] For of course in the Golden Age the first *a* of this word would have been recognised as long by its position before two consonants. Curiously enough, Diomedes himself admits this vowel to be long in the word *ārmă*, not, however, simply on account of its position, but because of the rule of the Latin language that the *accent* must necessarily be thrown back as far as the penultimate syllable. In the word *armatus* the tonic accent falls on the penultimate syllable because it is long by nature; hence, according to Diomedes, the voice passes rapidly over the first syllable, even though the vowel is followed by two consonants.

Now when the native power of the accent was making itself so irresistibly felt in scientific criticism and polite composition, it is easy to understand that, in popular verses made solely to meet the requirements of the ear, the laws of quantity would soon come to be completely disregarded. In the hymns composed by the early Christian fathers for use in churches we know that this was done deliberately, in order, as St. Augustine says, that they might not be driven by the necessities of metre to use words which were unfamiliar to the people.[2] Thus in the Hymn of St. Ambrose, cited by Bede, the metre employed is rightly described by the latter as being *like* the iambic (*ad instar iambici metrici*):

1

Ō Rēx, | ǣtēr|nĕ Dŏ|mĭnĕ,|
Rērūm | crĕāt|ŏr ōmn|ĭŭm,|
Quī ĕr|ās ān|tĕ sæ̆c|ŭlă,|
Sēmpĕr | cūm pă|trĕ fīl|ĭŭs,|

2

Quī mūn|dī īn | prīmōr|dĭō|
Ădām | plāsmās|tī hōm|ĭnĕm,|
Cŭī | tŭæ̅ | ĭmāg|ĭnī|
Vūltūm | dĕdīs|tī sĭm|ĭlĕm.|[3]

[1] Diomedes, *Ars Gram.* lib. ii. 470, 428 (Keil I.). Benlœw, *Précis d'une Théorie des Rhythmes*, Première Partie, p. 61.

[2] "Ne me necessitas metrica ad aliqua verba quæ vulgo minus sunt usitata compelleret."—S. Aug. *Retract.* lib. i. 20. Migne, 32, p. 617.

[3] Beda Venerabilis, *De Metricâ Ratione.* Migne, 90, p. 174.

Or to take an example of the popular use of the trochaic movement, we have the boys' chant in honour of Aurelian:[1]

> Ūnŭs | hŏmō | mīllĕ | mīllĕ | mīllĕ | dēcōl|lāvĭ|mŭs|
> Tāntŭm | vīnī | hăbēt | nēmŏ | qŭantŭm | fūdit | sāngŭin|is |

Here we have an ordinary trochaic tetrameter, with the exception that the different feet are not always strictly speaking trochees. To adapt this metre to the requirements of rhyme, when men once began to notice the capacities inherent in that metrical instrument, was a simple matter, as may be seen from the fact that, if the first two verses of the *Dies Iræ* be written in a single line, and the last syllable omitted, we have a trochaic tetrameter quite as regular as those just cited :—

> Dies | iræ, | dies | illa, | solvet | sæclum | in fa|vill|a|.

This is of course precisely the same as the metre of *Locksley Hall*—

> Comrades, | leave me | here a | little, | while as | yet 'tis | early | morn.|

In the same way we may trace the lineage of the Italian hendecasyllabic and the French and English decasyllabic heroic metres in unbroken descent from the iambic trimeter, commonly used among the Romans on the stage and in popular songs, such as that sung by the garrison of Modena in the tenth century :[2]—

> O tu qui servas armis ista mœnia,
> Noli dormire, moneo, sed vigila,
> Dum Hector vigil exstitit in Troia,
> Non eam cepit fraudulenta Græcia.

Compare this with the following lines from Sannazaro, and the Latin and Italian metres will be found to be fundamentally the same :—

> Solca nell' onde e nell' arene semine,
> E tenta i vaghi venti in rete accogliere,
> Chi fonda sua speranza in cor di femine [3]

[1] "Adeo ut etiam ballistea pueri et saltatiunculas in Aurelianum tales componerent, quibus diebus festis militariter saltitarent"—*Flavii Vopisci Aurelianus*, c. vi.

[2] Muratori, *Antiquitates Italicæ*, iii. 709

[3] Benlœw, *Précis d'une Théorie des Rhythmes*, Première Partie, p. 71

The number of rhymes in Italian technically called *sdruccioli* or "sliding" (that is to say, in which the tonic accent falls on the antepenultimate syllable, and all three of the rhyming syllables correspond in sound) is limited. Hence when rhyme came to be accepted as an essential principle of constructive harmony in the Romance languages, the last foot of the trimeter iambic naturally disappeared, and the Italian iambic verse was restricted to eleven syllables; while, for an analogous reason, the French verse of five accents, with the English metre which was imitated from it, had no more than ten. As to the octosyllabic metre, it is easy to see that it is the offspring of the iambic dimeter (like the Hymn of St. Ambrose), which it resembles both in the fall of the accent and the number of syllables, the differences between the two metres being caused by the introduction into the octosyllabic metre of the *cæsura* or pause and the rhyming close:—

> The wáy was lóng, || the wínd was cóld,
> The mínstrel || wăs infírm and óld.[1]

The sum of what has been said as to the history of modern European metres is, that many of the Greek metres were imported into the Latin language by the literary Roman poets; that some of them were afterwards modified, by the disregard of quantity, to suit the requirements of the popular ear; and that, still later, by some obvious retrenchments, they were accommodated to the changed character of the Romance languages which grew up out of the rustic Latin. The history of the rise of the new system of rhyming architecture on these old foundations cannot be traced with the same certainty, but is not beyond the reach of reasonable conjecture. When the Latin and the barbarian elements were fused in the Romance languages, the metrical system of these tongues was without the principle of rhythmical limitation, since on the one side quantity had disappeared, while alliteration, the basis of the barbarian minstrelsy, had fallen into disuse,

[1] It will be observed that the effect of the *cæsura* after the third syllable in the second line is to lighten the stress of the accent on the following syllable. This modification of the iambic movement is very frequent in English verse.

as the structure of the Frankish tongue gradually gave way before the powerful solvent of Latin culture. In all, therefore, that relates to what may be called the rhetoric of verse, in other words, to the marking of emphasis and the defining of periods, there was a sensible void. This the poets of the new languages supplied, by restricting each line to an equal number of syllables as well as of accents, and limiting each metrical period by the unity of rhyme. Their models of harmony were in all probability derived from the Arabs, who, after carrying their conquests into Syria and Persia, had invaded Spain and established a western court at Cordova, whence they threatened the kingdoms of Europe. Bearing in many respects a striking likeness to the great German tribe, especially in their chivalrous manners and their respect for women, the Arabs were far in advance of the Franks in refinement. Communications between the two races were frequent, and when Charlemagne exchanged courtesies with Haroun al Raschid he was probably not ignorant of the nature of Arab poetry. This much is certain, that in the earliest known metrical composition in the Romance language, the *Poem on Boethius*, the verses are measured by five accents falling at regular intervals within ten syllables, and are bound together into a strophe, by means of a single assonant rhyme recurring at each final syllable. Similar features are found in the *Chant de Roland* and other *Chansons de Geste*, the earliest productions of French vernacular poetry , and almost all of them, namely the strophe itself, the limitation of the strophe by the single rhyme, and the measurement of the verse by the number of syllables, appear centuries before in the *Kaside* or heroic love poem of the Arabs The only difference is, that where the French verse is measured by the regular beat of the accent, the Arab verse is determined by the recurrence of quantitative feet.

The evidence pointing to the Arab origin of Italian rhyme architecture is more positive and direct. When we remember the long occupation of Sicily by the Saracens, and the widespread influence of the court of Frederic II., crowded as it was with Arab philosophers and poets, the testimony

of Dante, speaking of the different species of Italian poetry, becomes highly significant. "First let us examine," says he, "the genius of the Sicilian dialect, for it seems to claim a pre-eminence over the others, both because all the poems written by Italians are called Sicilian, and also because many Sicilian writers have composed important poems."[1] If Italian poems were called Sicilian, it was doubtless because the examples of the art were derived from Sicily, in other words from the Arabs. And this presumption is rendered stronger by the names of the various kinds of poetry, *canzone*, *sonnet*, *ballad*, which Dante defines, and which all of them join with the metrical composition an accompaniment of singing, music, dancing, or all three combined. "We must, lastly, make mention," says Amari in his *History of the Mussulmans of Sicily*, "of the musicians who were accustomed to sing to the lute the verses of the poets; a usage which the Arabs learned from the Persians, and which was condemned and, wherever it was possible, forbidden by the strict Mussulmans, though the rich and the great often collected troops of musicians for singing and dancing."[2] Again, as the old-fashioned Arab *Kaside*, with its strophe of verses connected by a single rhyme, seems to have furnished the model for the *Chanson de Geste*, so the metrical germ of the *canzone* and sonnet is found in the *Mowascehât* or *Azgiâl*, a composition made up of verses in stanzas with corresponding rhymes recurring at fixed intervals. The following specimen of the *mowascehât* is cited by Amari:—

1

Wa ghazalin muscianneñ
  Kad retha li ba'da bu'di
  Lamma rea ma lakeitu

2

Mithiu raudhin mufawweñ
  La obâli wahwa 'indi
  Fi hubbihi ids dhaneitu.

[1] *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Book i. cap. 12. Muratori (*Antiq. Ital.* 705) on the whole inclines to the view here adopted.

[2] Translated from Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, vol. ii. p. 544. Compare with this Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Book ii. c. 12.

Compare with this the two following "feet," as Dante calls them, of the Ode, in the *canzone* beginning—

1

Amor, che nella mente mi ragiona
Della mia donna disiosamente,
Move cose di lei meco sovente
Che l' intelletto sovr' esse disvia.

2

Lo suo parlar si dolcemente sona
Che l' anima ch' ascolta e che lo sente
Dice "o me lassa!" ch' io non son possente
Di dir quel ch' odo della donna mia.[1]

So close a resemblance of metrical structure can scarcely have been the result of accident, and taking into account the popularity of the *mowascehât* among the Arabs, it is a fair conclusion that it first suggested to the poets of Sicily and South Italy the idea of metres with interlacing rhymes. "The *mowascehât*," says Amari, "were introduced first at the court of Cordova at the end of the ninth century; they were much in vogue in Africa and Spain from the eleventh century, and this western fashion found favour even in Egypt and Syria, and still survives. Whether it was a germ hidden in the national poetry of the Arabs, a novelty borrowed from Persia, or a mere imitation of the strophes and rhymes of low Latinity, which circulated perhaps among the clergy and people of Spain at the time of the conquest, the characteristics of the *mowascehât* are in every way lighter than those of the classic Arab poetry; the long verses divided by hemistiches; the single rhyme of longer compositions; the old-fashioned or obsolete words introduced for the sake of the rhyme or exuberance of diction; and, in the *Kaside*, the machinery of the lover visiting the spots deserted by his mistress," etc. etc.[2]

These last words seem to indicate the origin, not merely of the Italian and Provençal metres, but even of the poetical conventions observed by Petrarch and the troubadours. Petrarch, we know, was acquainted

[1] Dante, *Il Canzoniere*, Parte Seconda, canzone vii.
[2] Translated from Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, vol. iii. p. 740

with Arab poetry. Writing to a friend, he says, "What the Arab physicians are like, you know; but what their poets are like, I know; there is nothing more effeminate, more nerveless, more obscene."[1] Renan seems to doubt whether Petrarch had really read the poems he speaks of,[2] but it does not appear to be wonderful that the compositions of poets so much favoured by Frederic II. should have been known to their European neighbours, either in the original or in translations. Nor again is it unnatural that Petrarch, hating the Mussulmans as infidels, and imbued with the manly spirit of classic Latin poetry, should have looked with disdain on the softness, suppleness, and sensuous passion of the Arab *canzone*. But poets are often not too proud to borrow from what they affect to despise; and the many resemblances between Petrarch's sonnets and such a poem, for example, as the *Divan* of Ibn-Faridh (died 1230 A.D.), —the exaltation of the beloved mistress, the complaints of the absent lover, the constant analysis of amorous moods of feeling, the extravagance of metaphorical diction—make it almost incredible that the two classes of poetry should have sprung from two completely distinct sources of inspiration.

I have attempted to bridge over in various directions the gulf that seems to separate the civilisation of the ancient world from the thought and imagination of the community of Europe in the Middle Ages, at the time when the rising nations were beginning to make use of the vulgar tongues for the purposes of poetical composition. We must now, in accordance with the plan that has been proposed, travel into a different quarter, and trace the course of fusion between the elements that compose the English language, from the days when it was the isolated instrument of Anglo-Saxon thought, to the period when Chaucer made it into a vehicle for expressing the general interests and sentiments of the European system.

[1] Petrarch, *Opera Senilia*, lib. xii. ep. 2.

[2] "Comment Pétrarque a-t-il pu connaître la poésie arabe dont le moyen âge n'a pas eu la moindre notion?"—*Averroes*, p. 330, note 1.

CHAPTER III

THE POETRY OF THE ANGLO-SAXONS

OF the three elements of race that are found in the constitution of the English language—Celtic, Teutonic, and Latin—the most vital and powerful is the Teutonic. The Celtic influence on our tongue has been something quite inappreciable. Unlike their Gallic kinsmen when invaded by the Franks, the Britons had only acquired from their Roman masters a superficial tinge of civil culture. The war waged against them by the Saxons was one of extermination, so that, when pushed back by their enemies into the Cornish peninsula and the mountains of Wales, they disappeared, leaving scarcely a trace of their occupation of central Britain. Beyond the names of places in Cornwall and Wales, and words like "bard," indicating a peculiar caste or profession, "down" (Celtic *dûn*), describing a feature of physical scenery, and "boast," denoting a feature of the national character, few monuments of the race have been preserved in the language of their conquerors.[1]

On the other hand a very large part of the English vocabulary is derived from the Latin. When we pass the boundaries of common conversation, and use the terms of science, art, and literature, words drawn from this stock usually supply us with the instrument required to give the necessary shade of meaning. Our poetry and oratory have produced their finest effects by the combination of Latin with Saxon words, and the same is true of the

[1] Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary*, Preface, xviii.

language of worship as expressed in the *Book of Common Prayer*. But one significant circumstance shows that, in the vast majority of words of Latin descent, the immigrant alien has been forced to adapt itself to the genius of the native stock. The tonic accent in such words has been removed from the syllable on which by the law of the Latin language it originally fell, and has been placed, as far back as possible, on one of the syllables containing the stem of the word. Thus at their first introduction into the English language the words, náture, hónour, Sáturn, and cómmon were pronounced—and according to their derivation correctly—natúre, honoúr, Satúrn, commúne.

The invasion of Britain by the Saxons, whether it originated in the natural overflow of populations or in piratical adventure, seems to have been an incident in the great movement of tribes on the borders of the German Ocean which took place in the fifth century of the Christian era. Little is known for certain regarding the details of the conquest, but Bede's statement that the invaders came in three vessels containing Jutes, Angles, and Saxons, is perhaps a mythological reminiscence of the three great tribes who gradually brought the country under their dominion. It is generally admitted that Hengist and Horsa, who are said to have landed in Kent in 449 A.D., were Jutes; Ælla and his sons who subdued Sussex in 477 A.D. were Saxons, as were Cerdic and his nephews, who in 530 A.D. founded the kingdom of Wessex. The Angles, on the other hand, first established themselves in East Anglia, Bernicia, and Deira, that is to say, from Norfolk to the Frith of Forth, the northernmost part of which district was afterwards separated into the kingdom of Northumbria. The Anglian kingdom was founded in 547 A.D.; afterwards Penda, also a chief of the Angles, constituted the kingdom of Mercia in 626 A.D. From the speech of these various tribes rose the four chief English dialects, Northumbrian, West Saxon, Mercian, and Kentish.

All the invading tribes employed the Low German variety of the national tongue, and the monuments they

have left to us in it present a faithful image of Teutonic manners in respect to the holding of land, the recognition of family descent, and religious belief and custom. As a member of a victorious host, every ceorl, or freeman, was entitled to his allod in the conquered settlement, and to his share of common pasture on the mark or boundary that surrounded it. The earl, on the other hand, owed his position of superior rank and influence to his illustrious descent from a line of heroic ancestors, traced by the genealogical bard up to the eponymous founder whose existence was derived from the gods. Each of the earls, again, was attended by his *comitatus*, the remarkable body that makes so prominent a figure in Anglo-Saxon poetry, the members of which, as personal retainers of a lord, forfeited their legal status as freemen, but yet, through the liberality of their chief, enjoyed a larger share of wealth and power than the ceorls. The gods of the Saxons were the common Gothic deities, Woden, Thor, Freia, and Tiw—beings of limited powers, who, in the somewhat melancholy system of Teutonic mythology, seem to be unequal to cope with the mysterious forces of evil. Their abode is in Asgard, which lies above Mitgard, the earth, being separated by it from Niflheimer, the seat of bad and malignant spirits. Many religious rites and customs springing out of this ancient polytheism were retained by the Saxons long after their conversion to Christianity; and among them may be mentioned the May-games, the Whitsun Ales, the bringing-in of the boar's head at Yule-tide, the whipping of fruit-trees in spring, beating the boundaries, and the lighting of fires at Epiphany.[1]

Such were the materials out of which was woven the web of Teutonic minstrelsy. As to the metrical form in which the poet's conception was embodied, the following accurate description is borrowed from the writer of a nation with whom that ancient form found its last asylum —

"Every line of old Teutonic poetry is a blank verse divided into two halves by a line-pause which always comes at the end of a word.

[1] Elton, *Origins of England* (2nd edition), pp 390 f

"Each half is made up of a fixed number of measures; a measure being a word, or number of words, of which the first root syllable is stressed, *i.e.* forcibly pronounced, as one does in speaking when one wishes to draw attention to a particular word or syllable. . . . In every line two stress syllables at least, one in each half line, must begin with a similar consonant or a vowel (these vowels being usually different and in later Northern poetry always so). Stress syllables so alliterated are said to carry letter stress.

"In many lines there occur one or more unstressed syllables, which form, as it were, the elastic unmeasured part of the line; these for want of a better term we call slurred syllables, or collectively a slur. It is not meant that these syllables are gabbled over, they may be spoken fast or slow, but that they are redundant or unimportant for the 'make' or structure of the verse, and that they would be less emphasised, and spoken in a less vigorous tone than the rest of the line. There may be one or more slurs in a line.

"When a monosyllabic word is stressed and followed by no enclitic words before the next stress, it is succeeded by a short interval of silence, which we call a rest. Such a monosyllable with its rest is a measure in itself."[1]

In this metrical form were composed all the surviving poems in the Anglo-Saxon tongue. These poems fall naturally into three classes, which indicate the successive stages through which the art of minstrelsy passed: 1. Those which exhibit an unmixed cast of Teutonic thought. Of this class, however, it must be observed that, though the poems it contains (or at least their prototypes) were probably composed before the conversion of the Saxons to Christianity, yet, as they must have been long preserved merely in oral verse, they were liable to alteration when reduced to writing by scribes, who were usually ecclesiastics. 2. Those which were composed after the establishment of Christianity, and in which the poet is seen to be applying

[1] Vigfusson and Powell, *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, vol. i. pp. 433, 434.

the art of minstrelsy to scriptural subjects. 3. Those in which the influences of Latin ecclesiastical education have prevailed over the Teutonic spirit, the style of minstrelsy being applied to subject matter taken from lives of the saints or from Latin Christian poets. After this point the genius of Anglo-Saxon minstrelsy appears to become extinct. The literary movement, originated by Alfred, produced only prose works, and except for a few stray poems, like the fine narrative of the *Death of Byrhtnoth*, and the *Battle of Brunanburh*, it might be supposed that the art of the scop had disappeared from the life of the Anglo-Saxon race. The causes of this gradual process of decline are well worthy of consideration.

1. The scop, the fountain of all Teutonic poetry, was a member of the *comitatus*, and like his companions a man of noble birth.[1] It was his business to celebrate in song the wealth, the valour, the descent of his lord, and, in return for the satisfactory discharge of this duty, he received from the latter presents of rings, bracelets,[2] and lands.[3] This mutual relation is characteristically expressed at the end of the "Scop's Tale," perhaps the oldest composition in the Anglo-Saxon tongue:—"Thus wandering go with their lays over many lands the gleemen of men: their wants they express, their words of thanks they utter; always south or north they find one knowing in songs, liberal in gifts, who desires to exalt his greatness, to show his dignity in the presence of his nobles, until all vanishes, light and life together. He who works praise has under heaven enduring glory."[4] From this passage we see that the gleeman might attach himself to the service of many lords; and indeed the main motive of the "Scop's Song," which consists almost entirely of proper names, seems to have been a desire to impress his hearers for the time being with a sense of his vast experience, skill, and

[1] "Scop's Tale" (Thorpe's edition of the *Codex Exoniensis*) Hine from Myrgingum æthele onwocon.
[2] "Scop's Tale," *passim*.
[3] "Deor's Complaint," *Codex Exoniensis*, p. 379.
[4] "Scop's Tale," *Codex Exoniensis*, pp 326, 327.

popularity, without a prosaic regard to the strict limits of truth.[1]

The scopas competed with each other for their lord's favour,[2] and the artist who was worsted might forfeit the benefits previously granted to him. Thus in the "Complaint of Deor" we find the poet encouraging himself in adversity by recalling examples of others who had passed through misfortune. He concludes his song thus: "This will I say of myself; that once I was a scop of the Heodenings, dear to my lord: Deor was my name: for many winters I had a good retainership, a kind lord, until Heorrenda, a man skilled in song, received the land-right which formerly the earl had given me. That I surmounted; so may I this."[3] Sometimes death, or the fortune of war, dispersed the *comitatus*, and one of the most beautiful and pathetic passages in Anglo-Saxon poetry describes the feelings of the scop as he recalls in exile the joyous company of former days: "When sorrow and sleep often together bind the poor solitary one, then in his mind it seems to him that he embraces and kisses his lord, and lays on his knee his hands and his head, as when erewhile in days of old he enjoyed his gifts: then wakes once more the friendless man, and sees before him the fallow paths, the sea-fowl dipping and spreading their wings, rime and snow falling mingled with hail; then grow heavier the wounds of his heart, painful after dreaming, and sorrow is renewed."[4]

The songs of the scopas were sung before the lord and his companions in the ale or mead hall; and an admirable specimen of their art has been fortunately preserved in the *Song of Beowulf*. Of this famous poem the following is an outline:—

Scyld, the son of Scef, was an ancient king of Denmark. He had a son called Beowulf—not the hero of the lay—who again had a son Healfdene. To him were born four

[1] Among the numerous nations which this ingenious person—he probably lived sometime in the sixth century—visited were, it appears, the Hebrews, the Israelites, the Egyptians, the Medes and Persians.

[2] "Scop's Tale," *Codex Exoniensis*, p. 324; see the passage describing Widsith's contest with Skilling in praise of Ealhild.

[3] *Codex Exoniensis*, p. 379.

[4] *Ibid.* pp. 288, 289.

children, of whom the third, Hrothgar, succeeded his father on the throne. Hrothgar built a magnificent hall called Heorot, which was long used by the king and his nobles for the purposes of drinking and song, till it aroused the envy of a horrible demon named Grendel, who ravaged the place with nightly visitations, slaying and carrying off the thanes to his abode in the fens. It seemed that nothing could resist his power, but tidings of the calamity were at last brought to Beowulf, son of Egtheow, and thane of Higelac, king of Gotland, a man of unequalled strength, particularly renowned for his feats in swimming. Filled with a desire to rid the Danish kingdom of the pest, Beowulf crosses the sea in a ship with fourteen companions and is joyfully welcomed by Hrothgar and his court. Unarmed and alone he awaits Grendel in the famous hall, and after a fierce struggle, in which he tears the monster's arm out of the socket, drives him away, vanquished and mortally wounded, to perish in the fens. Hrothgar and his peers exult over the victory, but their rejoicing is premature, for Grendel's mother, an ancient sea-wolf, comes the next night into the hall and carries off one of the thanes. Beowulf now undertakes a new and still more perilous adventure. He descends in full armour into the sea, where he meets Grendel's mother swimming, and, being seized by her, is carried off to her cave, where, in the combat that ensues, he is near losing his life. Eventually he conquers her, and cutting off the heads of herself and her son returns to his companions who have given him up for lost. After being loaded by Hrothgar with gifts, blessings, and good advice, Beowulf returns to Higelac in Gotland, and relates to his lord, and Hygd, his queen, the various adventures through which he has passed. Afterwards Higelac falls in battle against the Franks, and Beowulf, who escapes from the slaughter by his great skill in swimming, is entreated by Hygd to mount the throne in place of her infant son Heardred. The hero, however, refuses, and loyally acts as guardian to the young king during his minority. The latter is in course of time killed in battle, and is then succeeded by

Beowulf. After ruling the kingdom in prosperity for fifty years, the hero undertakes a final adventure against a dragon, or fire-drake, who is wasting the country in revenge for the theft of a portion of a hidden treasure, over which, after the manner of his species, he has for several centuries been keeping watch and ward. Beowulf just contrives to kill this reptile, but not before he has himself received mortal hurt from the venomous wounds which his enemy inflicts upon him, and the poem ends with a description of the burning of his body on a gigantic funeral pile.

The interest attaching to this famous poem arises in part from its antiquity, but still more from the protracted dispute about the nature and origin of the composition, between the critics of the school of Wolf on the one hand, and those who maintain the theory of a single authorship on the other; and as the controversy has a strong bearing on the view which is here put forward as to the progress of Anglo-Saxon poetry it will be necessary to consider it in outline. The English editors of *Beowulf* have, without exception, held that the work, as we have it, is an original composition proceeding from the mind of one author. Mr. Arnold, in his edition of 1876, argues that the poet was a Christian and an ecclesiastic, and that *Beowulf* was the literary result of an Anglo-Saxon mission for the Christianising of the Danes in the eighth century. Professor Earle, in the preface to his translation (1892), considers that the poem was probably composed in the tenth century, at the court of Offa, king of Mercia, and that it was of the nature of an "Institution of a Prince." Both Mr. Arnold and Mr. Earle agree, however, n thinking that the song, as we have it, was written down s soon as it was composed. The German followers of Volf, on the other hand, and in particular Karl Müllenhof, gard the poem, in its existing form, as a fortuitous llection of ancient lays, brought into a kind of unity en the story was first reduced to writing, and afterwards ered and added to by the hand of a late editor. So ngly did this conviction take possession of the mind Müllenhof, that he had the assurance to pronounce

1395 lines of the single existing MS excrescences on the original poem.

The general reader, brought face to face with such harsh oppositions of criticism, has constant need to remember that, whatever conclusion he may arrive at, he can never pass beyond the region of probabilities. If he is wise, he will agree with Seneca that life is too short to settle such questions judicially, and will be content with making use of each hypothesis up to the point at which it seems consistent with the general spirit and character of the written text. For example, without adopting Wolf's extreme conclusions, it may be allowed that his method of reasoning throws a highly suggestive light on the origin of the *Iliad*. There is an antecedent improbability that the great poem we assign to Homer should, with all its elaboration of art and manners, have sprung from the unassisted invention of a single mind. But it is equally improbable that the poem as we possess it, showing such distinct signs of unity in thought and workmanship, should have been the product of a mere fortuitous concourse of poetical atoms, reduced to a kind of form and order by the manipulation of a late literary age. In order to reconcile these two opposite improbabilities, we want some middle position of probability, and this middle position is surely Homer himself. To imagine an age of archaic minstrelsy in which the events of a past, dimly remembered and magnified by distance, should be recorded in rude forms of art, is only to suppose that the first generations of Greek poets resembled in genius their unpolished kinsmen of the Teutonic tribes Nor is it difficult to believe that, with the growing sense of refinement, a great master of the art of minstrelsy should have perceived, before the invention of letters, how these primitive materials might be welded into a beautiful and harmonious form of song That the composition of such a singer, handed down by the powerful memory of unlettered ages, should have been preserved till the time came when it could be enshrined in written characters, is an hypothesis warranted by reason and

experience; whereas it appears in the highest degree unlikely that, if the unification of the *Iliad* was not attempted till the time of Pisistratus, all mention of the fact should have been omitted by critics like Plato and Aristotle.[1]

Now if we apply a similar process of reasoning to the story of Beowulf, it seems that the hypothesis of Müllenhof, apart from the extravagant use which is made of it, is well calculated to throw light on the origin of the composition. At any rate it accounts for many features in the poem which the interpretation of the English critics leaves in obscurity. For if, with Mr. Arnold and Professor Earle, we suppose *Beowulf* to be a deliberate literary composition, we must also with them conclude the author to have been a "Christian and an ecclesiastic." But in that case how are we to account for the unmistakably heathen texture of the story? Mr. Arnold, who puts forward his theory in a spirit of admirable moderation, explains this by supposing that the Anglo-Saxon poet obtained his materials from the heathen Danes whom he was seeking to convert to Christianity. I confess I find a difficulty in conceiving that any person, animated with the primitive zeal of a Teutonic missionary, would have also carried on his perilous enterprise the tastes of a literary *dilettante*. For the same reason I can scarcely think that, even if the ingenious moral allegory, which Professor Earle finds in the story, could be readily extracted from the text, this would have been the kind of "Institution" employed in the training of a Christian prince. Surely the history of Christianity among the Anglo-Saxons gives us every reason to suppose that, if moral instruction was given in the court of King Offa, the methods employed would have been those of the Latin Church, and the teaching that of the Gospels.

But again it is evident that the style of *Beowulf* is not that of a literary poet, but of a minstrel. Had it been a deliberate literary composition, it would have exhibited some traces of central design, and its joints

[1] The reader will find this subject discussed with learning and completeness in Mr. Andrew Lang's *Homer and the Epic* (1893).

and articulations would have been carefully marked; but the poem as it stands is a medley of heterogeneous materials, singularly wanting in plan and consistency. A literary "Demiurgus" of Anglo-Saxon descent, and separated by a long period from the events which he professed to be recording, would undoubtedly have tried to produce an appearance of order in his creation, by furnishing a clue to his historical allusions. But nothing can be more careless and casual than the references to the heroic exploits, the family relationships, and the tribal feuds of the persons and nations mentioned in the course of the story. This is just what might be expected in the style of oral minstrelsy; it is indeed an exact reproduction of the style of Homer. Exceedingly Homeric, too, are the stereotyped forms employed by the narrator to indicate stages in the action: the words prefatory to speeches, *e.g.* Beowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgþeówes, Beowulf spake, the son of Ecgtheow; *τὸν δ' ἠμείβετ' ἔπειτα Γερήνιος ἱππότα Νέστωρ*—formularies of description, such as, "The time flew on; the ship floated on the waves; the bark lay under the hill and the seamen with alacrity climbed on to her stern; the streams rolled; the water dashed against the sands"[1]—the descriptions of objects by means of metaphors, as "hyrde folces," the shepherd of the people, *ποιμένα λαῶν*; "fealone flod," the fallow flood, *ἀτρύγετος θάλασσα*; "ban-loca," bone-locker, meaning flesh, just as Homer speaks of the "fence of teeth," *ἕρκος ὀδόντων*—and the use of conventional epithets like "ellen-rôf," confident in his might, *κύδεϊ γαίων*. From these and similar characteristics I am inclined to infer that the poem, in its existing form, was composed for the purpose of chanting or recitation, on lines long familiar to the Teutonic race, and by the aid of materials derived perhaps from a remote antiquity. But it is not, therefore, necessary to assent to Müllenhof's dogma

[1] Compare with this the conventional Homeric formula in the *Odyssey*:—

"οἱ δ' αἶψ' εἴσβαινον καὶ ἐπὶ κληῖσι καθῖζον,"
"ἑξῆς δ' ἑζόμενοι πολιὴν ἅλα τύπτον ἐρετμοῖς"
Odyssey, ix. 103, 563, and xii. 146.

that it is a *mere* assemblage of unconnected lays, each of which may be regarded as having once formed a separate whole. The unity of the work lies in the deeds and character of Beowulf, and this central conception shows every sign of having proceeded from the mind of a single poet, though it was doubtless built by him out of materials previously existing. That he was a Christian and sang before a Christian audience is evident, but I do not think we need conclude with Mr. Arnold that he was an ecclesiastic. It seems to me more reasonable to suppose him a scop of the roving kind described in *The Traveller*, who was accustomed to wander from court to court, entertaining the lords who supported him with the legends of ancestors common to the race.[1] On this hypothesis there would be no difficulty in understanding why the exploits of Danes and Swedes should have been recited in the court of an Anglo-Saxon king. Whether the poem was altered or added to after it was reduced to writing is a question of comparatively trifling importance.

Thus much it has been necessary to say in support of the proposition that *Beowulf* is to be regarded as a sample of the minstrelsy prevailing among the Anglo-Saxons before their conversion to Christianity. For whatever may be the date of the composition, it is clear that in the essence of its mythology, in its treatment of history, and in its representation of manners, the poem affords a vivid reflection of primitive Teutonic life. As regards mythology, it is of course impossible for us to form a clear conception of the manner in which our ancestors reasoned about nature; but the demons and monsters mentioned in *Beowulf* must in some way have represented to them the wasting forces of evil by which mankind are beset. Moreover, it is to be observed that the chief of these malignant beings—Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the fire-drake—are each associated with different elements. The Christian poet is indeed at much pains to point out that Grendel was a descendant of Cain; but

[1] See p. 83.

headland slopes which in the mid-day time often notice [sailors while they are plying] a weary voyage," and drag them down to the bottom of the sea.[1] Lastly, there is the fire-drake, the venomous serpent, who is slain by Beowulf in his last combat, but not before the hero himself has been mortally wounded with the monster's poisoned breath. The dragon is an animal of frequent occurrence in Teutonic legend, usually associated with hidden treasure. In the Edda it appears as Fafnir, the monstrous worm that guards the hoard, and is slain by Sigurd, while, according to the tradition preserved by the thane in *Beowulf*, the same feat is assigned to Sigemund, father of Sigurd.[2] Beowulf's death closely resembles that of Thor, as recorded in the Edda, where it is related that the god killed the Mitgard snake, but was himself suffocated by the floods of poison which his enemy vomited forth in his last agony.

Beowulf, who disposes of all these pests, appears in the poem under a double aspect. On his mythological side he is represented with something of the character of Hercules, and is the personification of strength and endurance, semi-divine attributes which he perhaps acquired from his namesake Beowulf, the legendary king of Denmark, whose name is said to be connected with the word Beawa or Beowa, meaning "Cultivator."[3] In this sense it is easy to believe that the story presented to the Teutonic mind a parable of the victory of human skill over the destroying powers of nature. But Beowulf chiefly figures in the poem as the thane of Higelac, and in this capacity, if not historical himself, he is mixed up with the persons and events of history. For there can be no doubt that Higelac, king of the Geatas, Beowulf's lord, is the same monarch as Chochilaicus mentioned in the *History of Gregory of Tours*,[4] and in the *Gesta Regum Francorum*, as having been killed by the Franks in a descent on the country of the Attoarii (the Het-ware of *Beowulf*, 2913). This event occurred in A.D. 511, and it is therefore not unreasonable to conclude

[1] *Beowulf*, 1425.
[2] *Ibid.* 875-897.
[3] T. Arnold's edition. Glossary, p. 209.
[4] *Gregorii Turonici Historiæ Francorum*, iii. 3; *Gesta Regum Francorum*, cap. xix.

that other incidents recorded in *Beowulf* and other poems —such as the reconciliation of the Heathobards and the Danes by means of the marriage of Freawara with Ingeld (*Beowulf*, 2025); the renewal of the blood-feud at the wedding-feast (*Ibid.* 2041); the attack of the Heathobards on Heorot (*Traveller's Song*, v. 49); and the death of Heardred, the young king of the Geatas (*Beowulf*, 2385)—have also a firm basis of fact. The royal genealogies, alike of the Danes and of the Geatas, as given in the poem, are no doubt faithful records of fact, but, as we pass from these family traditions into more remote antiquity, it is to be observed that the historical element gradually melts into legend. Thus the historic name of Hermanric (the Eormenric of *Beowulf*) is associated with the palpable fable of Hama, his thane, who is said to have incurred his lord's enmity by carrying off the famous Brisinga-men, or necklace of Freia. After this we leave the region of history, and find ourselves in the cycle of heroic mythology, amidst stories of Sigemund and Sigurd, at which point the life of the heroes merges in the life of the gods. As in Greek mythology, the historic sense of the bard seems unable to extend itself through family records for more than two or three generations above the date of the historic exploits which form the groundwork of his song

Beowulf abounds in admirably vivid descriptions of Teutonic manners. When the hero and his companions land in Denmark, they are conducted to the presence of King Hrothgar, who is sitting in the mead-hall surrounded by his thanes. After announcing their errand—

"Then was a bench cleared for the sons of the Geatas [to sit] close together in the beer-hall; there the stout-hearted ones went and sat exulting clamorously. A thane attended to their wants, who carried in his hands a chased ale-flagon, and poured the pure, bright liquor. A scop between-whiles sang with clear voice in Heorot."[1]

The feast having advanced to a certain point Hrothgar's queen comes into the hall, bearing a cup of mead, which, in the first place, she offers to the king, and after-

[1] *Beowulf*, 491. T. Arnold's translation.

wards bears round to the rest of the company. In the same manner Hygd, the queen of Higelac, is represented performing a similar office after the return of Beowulf to Gotland, and occasionally distributing bracelets. Liberality of this kind was the most essential quality in the character of a Teutonic ruler. Hrothgar was fully alive to his duties, and the presents which he lavished on Beowulf after the destruction of Grendel and his mother were of the most costly description; but he warns Beowulf against following the example of Heremod who, "though the mighty God exalted him with the delights of power and with pre-eminence, and brought him forward above all men, yet in his heart there grew a secret hoard of bloodthirsty desires; he was far from giving rings to the Danes according to justice in right; joyless he abode, till he suffered the results of that struggle, a lingering general ruin. Teach thou thyself by him, understand munificence."[1]

There is an exceedingly interesting touch in the poem illustrative of the Teutonic institution of the *Weregyld*, whereby each man's life was valued in money. One of Beowulf's companions having been killed in Heorot, Hrothgar "gave orders to pay the price in gold of that one man whom Grendel had wickedly slain."[2] But still more characteristic are those passages in which the genius of the poet has been fired by the spirit of the *comitatus*. Beowulf is accompanied to his fight with the fire-drake by his body companions. Unhappily these did not do their duty in the hour of need: "Not then in a band did his chosen comrades, sons of nobles, stand around him with their soldierly virtues; but they crouched down in the wood, their lives to save."[3] There was, however, one noble exception:—

"Wiglaf spake many solemn words, said to the liegemen (his soul was sorrowful): 'I remember that time that we took mead, when we promised to our lord in the beer-hall, who gave us these precious things, that we would pay him for his war equipments if such as this should befall him—the helmets and hard swords which he chose for us in the

[1] *Beowulf*, 1715. T. Arnold's translation.
[2] *Ibid.* 1053.
[3] *Ibid.* 2596.

army of his own accord for this expedition—reminded us of deeds of fame, and to me treasures gave for this cause, because he accounted us good spearmen, keen helmeted soldiers.'"[1]

He rushed to the assistance of his lord, and helped him to kill the dragon, though he was unable to save his life. After the fight the shame-faced *comitatus* find him sitting by the body of the dead king.

"Wiglaf spoke, Weohstan's son, the sad-hearted man looked on the hated ones: 'Lo! this may he say who desireth to speak truth, that the liege lord who gave you these arms of price, the cavalry trappings in which ye stand there (when he on the ale-bench used often to give helmet and coat of mail to those sitting in the hall, the prince to his thanes, such as he could find anywhere of the most splendid sort, far or near), absolutely flung away in vain those warlike accoutrements. When battle surprised him, the people's king needed not by any means to boast of his comrades on the march; yet God, the ordainer of victories, granted him that he alone with his blade might avenge himself when he had need of valour. . . . Too few defenders thronged around their prince when the emergency came upon him. Now shall the taking of treasure, and the distribution of swords, all joy of estates and kindness, cease for your kindred: each man of the clan-burgh may go about destitute of land-right after that nobles from afar shall learn of your flight, your inglorious deed. Death is better for every earl than ignominious life.'"

Passages of this kind seem to breathe all that is most noble in the spirit of chivalry, and explain the vigorous growth of the institution. A valuable parallel to them exists in the historical poem on the *Death of Byrhtnoth*, in which some scop of the tenth century describes the battle of Maldon between the Danes and the Saxons. Byrhtnoth, brave ealdorman of East Anglia, falls in the fight. Then, says the poet:—

"Cowards turned to flight. First, the sons of Adda: Godric forsook the noble one who had given him many a

[1] *Beowulf*, 2631. T. Arnold's translation.

horse, and fled upon his lord's own steed; and with him his brothers Godwine and Godwig, and more of the warriors than was at all becoming. Æthelred's eorl, the people's prince, had fallen; all of his kindred saw that the lord lay slain. The proud warriors rushed up, willed either to avenge the dear one, or to yield their lives. Ælfric's son, the young warrior Ælfwine, exhorted them. He said: 'Think of the speeches which we often spoke at mead, when we raised up vaunting on the bench, heroes in the hall, about hard battle. Now may be shown who is bold. I will show forth my lineage to all, that I was of a high race in Mercia. My old father was called Ealdhelm, a wise ealdorman, worldly prosperous. Never shall the thegns reproach me among the people, that I would desert this host, and seek my country now that my prince lies slain in battle. That is my greatest grief; he was both my kinsman and my lord.'"[1]

But the *Death of Byrhtnoth* is a late and almost solitary survival in Anglo-Saxon poetry of the ancient art of minstrelsy. Of the poems contained in the *Exeter Book* and the *Vercelli Book*, there are few that exhibit any signs of the old mythological traditions, the warlike temper, or the tribal manners, that give so much life to the *Song of Beowulf*. Many of them, however, are animated by a spirit which, in its own way, is almost equally characteristic of the Teutonic temper. Without any direct trace of Christian influences, they nevertheless breathe an air of melancholy reflection very different from that love of movement and activity which distinguishes the heroic sagas. Sometimes this feeling embodies itself in verses of gnomic wisdom, sometimes it is expressed dramatically, in the reverie of an old sailor looking back on his sufferings on the sea, or of an exile remembering the joys of old companionship. A more philosophical vein of thought runs through a remarkable poem inspired by the sight of an ancient and ruined city, apparently Bath, destroyed by the minstrel's barbarous countrymen:—

[1] Ten Brink's translation. *History of Early English Literature* (Kennedy's translation), p. 195.

"Wondrous is the wall-stone; the fates have broken it, have wrecked the borough; ruined is the work of giants; fallen are the roofs, tottering the turrets, the hoary gate-towers all ravaged, hoar-frost on the mortar, shattered the battlements, shorn away and sunken, under-eaten by Eld."

"Many a chief of yore," continues the poet, "gleeful and gold-bright, gloriously apparelled, haughty and flown with wine, shone in his armour, looked on treasure and on silver and on curious gems, on luxury and possessions, and on this bright borough of a broad kingdom. There stood the courts of stone; hot ran the stream, widely whirling. The wall compassed it all in its bright bosom. There were the baths, hot on the breast: that was health-giving!"[1]

2. The genius of reflection which prevails in poems of this kind is largely to be ascribed to the natural decline in the spirit of action. Cut off from their kinsmen on the Continent, the Saxons acquired something of the character of their conquered enemies—*penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos.* The various tribes pent within their insular boundary might struggle with each other for supremacy, but the limits of the several kingdoms soon defined themselves, and within these the recognition of the rights of private property, and a settled system of law and justice, deprived the bard of many of the themes suggested by the once perpetual movement of war and migration. But there is another, and a still more interesting class of surviving Anglo-Saxon poems, which exhibit the effects of a newly-imported Christianity on the ancient springs of heathen song. In these the poet, leaving the records of Teutonic mythology, chooses his subjects entirely from the Scriptures, but translates them for the benefit of his hearers into the time-honoured diction of tribal minstrelsy. This new development of the art is admirably illustrated by the story of Cædmon.

Christianity, introduced into Kent in 597 A.D. by Augustine, was carried within thirty years by Paulinus

[1] *Codex Exoniensis*, pp 476-478.

into Northumbria, in which kingdom it spread with great rapidity. The heathen idols were overthrown, and churches and abbeys sprang up in all parts of the country. Yet the people retained many of their primitive customs, and among them the practice of singing in the mead-hall the old legends and traditions of their race. Almost every one took part in this diversion, but one man, Cædmon, seemed so devoid of the gift of song, that whenever he saw the harp approaching him he would rise and leave the company. One evening, after he had done so, he fell asleep in his house, and saw in a vision a heavenly form which commanded him to sing. Cædmon replied that he knew neither how nor what to sing. "Sing," said the vision, "the origin of things," and then pronounced the verses which Bede has preserved in his *History*, and which open the *Paraphrase of Genesis*, commonly believed to be the work of Cædmon. In the morning Cædmon remembered the verses, and repeated them to his friends, through whom the wonderful occurrence came to the ears of Hilda, Abbess of Whitby. By her the powers of the new poet were tested, and found to be so remarkable that, though he knew no Latin, yet, on a passage of Scripture being explained to him, he was able to turn it into poetical Saxon diction of such sweetness as to attract large audiences from all the neighbouring countryside.

It seems probable that some of the poetry in the *Metrical Paraphrase*, once ascribed to Cædmon, is the work of a later mind;[1] but this is a fact of no importance

[1] We have no evidence beyond the passage in Bede (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, iv. 24) for assigning any of the poems in the *Metrical Paraphrase* to Cædmon, who, as we know from the historian, had many followers and imitators. In default, however, of any positive evidence to the contrary, it seems reasonable to suppose him the author of those poems which answer to Bede's description: "Canebat autem de Creatione Mundi, et tota Genesis historia, de egressu Israel ex Ægypto et ingressu in terram repromissionis, de aliis plurimis sacræ Scripturæ historiis, de Incarnatione Dominicâ, Passione, Resurrectione, et Ascensione in Cœlum, de Spiritus Sancti adventu, et Apostolorum Doctrinâ." The passage in Genesis describing the Temptation and Fall of Man is evidently an interpolation (a very fine one); and the poem describing Christ's Descent into Hell is the work of some poet who was better acquainted than Cædmon is likely to have been with the Apocryphal Scriptures.

in considering the modifications in the art of minstrelsy introduced by Christianity. It is, on the other hand, most significant to observe how many of the fundamental notions of Teutonic mythology and custom are interwoven with Cædmon's reproductions of the Scripture narrative. Thus the image by which the Bible always suggests the torments of Gehenna is *fire;* but the old German conception of Niflheimer, or the under-world, was a place of cold and mist, and these conflicting ideas are strangely blended in many passages at the opening of Cædmon's Genesis, in which the poet seeks to paint the abode of the devil. For example:—

"Then was God angry and wroth with that host whom formerly He had honoured with beauty and renown. For those traitors He shaped a house of banishment, with anguish for their reward, the groans of hell, hard punishments. Our Lord, Guardian of spirits, bade a house of torment await the exiles, deep, void of joys When He knew that it was ready, furnished with perpetual night, charged with sulphur, filled throughout with fire, *with intense cold*, smoke and red flame, then through that house void of comfort He bade the dread of torment to increase."[1]

And again:—

"Therefore them in a worse light God had placed triumphless in a dark hole; there at even they have, each of the fiends, an immeasurably long renewal of fire; and ere dawn comes, the east wind, frost, bitter cold, [piercing like] fire or dart."[2]

Mists, too, and vapours prevail in this region as in Niflheimer: "God himself hath swept us into these swart mists" (thas sweartan mistas).[3]

In the Teutonic creed, monstrous serpents coil round the world, like the Mitgard's Ormr; or lurk underneath it, like the snakes that haunt the spring Hvergelmir, or the dreadful reptile which fought with Thor. A reminiscence of these horrors pervades the description of hell as painted in the *Descensus ad Inferos*, a late addition to the

[1] Cædmon's *Paraphrase* (Thorpe), p. 3. [2] *Ibid.* p. 20
[3] *Ibid.* p. 25.

Cædmonian cycle. "Ever at hell-gate," says the poet, "dragons dwell, hot in spirit, they may not help us."[1] Hence it is imagined that "the floor is on fire with venom scorched," and hell itself is described as "a horrid den with venom blended."[2]

The vividly real descriptions of hell in these poems, recalling the style of Dante, could only have been given by one familiar with the traditions of polytheism. Thus in one passage the poet tells us: "Verily he might hear who was twelve miles from hell that there was teeth-grinding loud and mournful."[3] And when, in the *Descensus ad Inferos*, Satan is cast finally into the burning pit, it is said that, "when he stood on the bottom there seemed to him to be from thence to hell-gate an hundred thousand miles of measured space."[4] Something, too, of the old heathen terror of the mark-land, an example of which has been given before, fills the minstrel's animated rendering of the march of the Israelites out of Egypt. "The heavenly candle (*i.e.* the pillar of fire) burned, the new night-ward must perforce rest over the hosts, lest the horrors of the waste, the hoar heath with its raging storms, should overwhelm them, their souls should fail."[5]

Nor is the ancient spirit less conspicuous in the paraphrase of those portions of Genesis which relate to war or military organisation. Abraham is described in the genuine Teutonic vein as "the bold earl"[6]; Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is "the dispenser of treasure."[7] When Satan is meditating his rebellion in heaven, he reasons with himself as follows:—

"Heroes stern of mood have chosen me for their chief, renowned warriors; with such may one take counsel, with such folk companions shape it. They are my zealous friends, faithful in their thoughts; I may be their leader, rule in this realm: thus it seems not right to me that I in aught should cringe to God for any good. I will no longer be his younger (vassal)."[8]

[1] Cædmon's *Paraphrase* (Thorpe), p. 270.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 266; see also p. 273. [3] *Ibid.* p. 283. [4] *Ibid.* p. 310.
[5] *Ibid.* pp. 184, 185. [6] *Ibid.* p. 110. [7] *Ibid.* p. 111. [8] *Ibid.* p. 19.

We seem to be listening to some powerful count reckoning up the force of his *comitatus* in view of a conflict with his feudal superior. So, too, when the paraphraser has to describe the battle between the four against the five kings, an image of a tribal battle rises in his mind:—

"Then was hard-play, an exchange of deadly weapons, a great war-cry, a loud crash of battle. The warriors from their sheaths drew their ring-hilted swords of doughty edge."[1]

Abraham comes to the rescue of the defeated party:—

"Then the holy man bade his hearth retainers take their weapons; warriors he found there, bearers of the ashen spear, eighteen and three hundred beside, faithful to their lord, of whom he knew that each could well bear into battle the yellow linden."[2]

The foregoing extracts serve to show how many characteristics of the old minstrelsy were preserved in the Cædmonian cycle of song. Different as was now the aim, changed as were the materials, of the poet, the Christian bard resembled his heathen predecessor in this, that he was able, by means of familiar images and diction, to arrest the imagination of a popular audience. Though he no longer sought to move them by the memory of their tribal belief and traditions, the new themes he touched on his harp were of a kind to rouse their elemental emotions. The wandering life of the patriarchs and the children of Israel, the records of family descent, the dramatic incidents of Biblical history, related in a manner equally simple and sublime, struck direct chords of sympathy in the German heart; while many notes of Hebrew poetry itself, such as the frequent use of "parallelism" and metaphor, are reproduced in the style of the Anglo-Saxon minstrel. In a word, the most noticeable feature in Cædmon's art is the readiness with which an exotic class of subjects becomes naturalised in the old poetical soil.

3. Very different is the character of the Saxon poetry of later date. As Cædmon is the single name which typifies

[1] Cædmon's *Paraphrase* (Thorpe), p. 121. [2] *Ibid.* p. 123.

the style of the Scripture paraphrasts, so Cynewulf stands forth as the most illustrious representative of what may be called the Latin school of poets who succeeded Cædmon. This poet has left the seal of his authorship on several of his poems in the form of Runic letters composing his name, but we have no certain knowledge of the time or place at which he lived. By some he is supposed to be the same as Kenulphus, Abbot of Peterborough in the beginning of the eleventh century;[1] and though the style of his poems suggests an earlier date, we may at least infer from what he says of himself that he was an ordained priest. Like Cædmon his poetical genius seems to have been late in its development.

"I knew not at all," he says in his *Elene*, "the truth about the cross, until Wisdom revealed to me wider knowledge through her glorious power over the thoughts of the mind. I was an enemy by wicked works, fast bound with sins, vexed with sorrows, in cruel bondage, compassed thick with cares, until the King of armies, by my heavenly ordination, bestowed knowledge upon me for comfort to me when aged, measured out his bounteous grace, and poured it into my mind, displayed clear light to me, and made it broad at times, set my body free, opened my heart, and caused poetic power to break forth in me, which I have used in the world with pleasure and good-will."[2]

The works certainly of Cynewulf's composition are the *Legend of St. Guthlac*, the *Legend of St. Juliana*, *Christ*, *Andreas*, *Elene*, and the *Fortunes of the Twelve Apostles*. Besides these, there are several poems in the *Exeter Book*, which, if not by him, are inspired by motives similar to his, such as "Riddles," the paraphrase of the poem on the "Phœnix," ascribed to Lactantius, the "Panther," the "Whale," etc.

The peculiarity of these poems is that they are, all of them, based on Latin originals, whether in prose or verse, viz., 1. Lives of Saints; 2. Homilies; 3. Physiologi, or Books on Natural History; 4. Late Latin Poets.

[1] Kemble, *Poetry of the Codex Vercellensis*, Preface, p. viii.
[2] *Elene*, Weymouth's translation, p. 36.

They differ also in motive from the Cædmonian paraphrases. The first race of Christian Anglo-Saxon minstrels sang to the people, conveying to them by poetry an elementary knowledge of the truths of Christianity, which no form of preaching could have imparted with equal lucidity. Their poetical successors had a purpose likewise didactic, and the methods they adopted were in some respects the same; but their teaching was addressed not so much to laymen as to monks. Such alterations in the conditions and aims of minstrelsy acted as solvents on the primitive character of the art. It was not that the new school of poets was wanting in genius; on the contrary many single strokes in their compositions give proof of skill and fancy. A great number of critics are even enthusiastic on behalf of Cynewulf, whom in point of sublimity they are ready to raise to a level with Cædmon.[1] This is an estimate I must venture, with all deference, to question, and I am inclined to think that those who have formed it have been misled by the exuberance in Cynewulf of a poetical diction, which often continues after the genuine springs of inspiration have begun to fail.

This much may, at any rate, be observed with confidence about the style of the late Anglo-Saxon poets. As regards their Lives of Saints, on the whole their best performances, though the Latin originals which they paraphrase are prosaic narratives, they are content to follow the main course of the text almost with servility, careless whether the details are or are not suitable for treatment in verse. From this censure, however, the closing portion of the *Legend of St. Guthlac* and the *Andreas* ought to be excepted. In Cynewulf's *Christ* it is difficult to discern any conception of poetical form raising the composition above a homily in verse. On the other hand, there are many signs that Gregory the Great's allegorical method of interpreting Scripture has had a sophisticating effect on the simplicity of the minstrel's art. In one passage Cynewulf follows the conceit of Gregory,

[1] See, for example, Mr Stopford Brooke's interesting remarks on this poet, *History of Early English Literature*, vol. i. pp. 191-240

which describes the six "leaps" (*saltus*) of Christ between the Incarnation and Ascension.[1] In another he devotes many lines to considering why it was that the angels appeared in white robes to the apostles after the Resurrection, whereas it is not recorded that they wore them on their appearance to the shepherds at the Nativity.[2] The same characteristic appears in the poems on animals, the habits of which are described, that the poet may have an opportunity of dwelling on the spiritual truth which each of them is supposed to symbolise. In copying the late Latin poets, Cynewulf and his school are content to imitate the trivial subjects of their masters, without reflecting on the radical difference between the Latin and Teutonic styles of poetry, —the terseness and condensation of the hexameter, the expansion and verbosity of alliterative verse. They appear to have greatly admired the *Enigmata* of Symphosius (a third-rate Latin poet of the fifth century), each of which is propounded in three hexameters; but their own "Riddles," couched in the spacious diction of minstrelsy, lose such little character as their originals derived from epigrammatic point. The third "Passus" of Cynewulf's *Christ* is a mere amplification of the fine Latin hymn *De die Judicii*, but whereas this consists of 46 lines the Anglo-Saxon version swells into 330.

Traces of the primitive genius of the race still survive. A dialogue between Joseph and Mary in the First "Passus" of Cynewulf's *Christ* breathes a genuine dramatic spirit;[3] and, in a remarkable monologue addressed by a condemned spirit to the body from which it has departed, we find an interesting relic of Teutonic mythology:—

"The ghost shall come anxiously moaning, always on the seventh night, the soul to find its body that once it quickened, through three hundred years, unless the Eternal Lord, Almighty God, ere that shall bring the end of the world."[4]

[1] See Cynewulf's *Christ* (Gollancz' edition), Part ii. pp. 63-65, and compare with Gregory, *Hom.* 29. 9, 10 (Migne, 76. 1218-19).
[2] *Ibid.* pp. 40-45. [3] *Ibid.* p. 16. [4] *Codex Exoniensis*, p. 367.

The ancient forms of imagery and phraseology are studiously observed. Thus, in the "Passus" of the *Christ* on the Ascension, we read:—

"The Majestic Lord called His band of thanes. . . . Soon were they ready, men with their Lord, for the holy borough, where to them the Lord of Splendour, the Helm of Bliss, revealed many a token in mystic words, ere He ascended, only begotten Son, Child co-eternal with his own Father."[1]

And again—

"Then went to Jerusalem, the valiant men to the holy borough, sad in mood, after they had seen with their own eyes God up-rising, their kind Dispenser."[2]

But the ancient life is departing. The Teutonic spirit, weakened by its isolation from the great body of the race on the Continent, tamed by the softening influences of Christianity, seems on the point of making its submission to the more powerful arts of Latin civilisation, commended to them by the spiritual head of the Church which claimed their full allegiance. Everywhere we feel the all-pervading presence of the encyclopædic education. The way is thus prepared for the introduction of literary prose under the auspices of King Alfred For it is noticeable that the different translations which the king ordered to be made into the Anglo-Saxon tongue were all of recognised text-books, such as the *Ecclesiastical History* of Bede, the *Chronicles* of Orosius, the *De Consolatione Philosophiæ* of Boethius, the *Pastoral Care* of St. Gregory, and that (though his biographer speaks of his love of them) he seems to have made no provision for reducing to writing the vernacular songs of the people.[3] In the prose dialect of Wessex, now accepted as the literary standard, the conventual scholar found an instrument of expression more congenial to him than alliterative verse, and his labours were devoted mainly to the translation of the Gospels, the chronicling of the meagre history of the times, or the preservation of the pious eloquence of great

[1] Cynewulf's *Christ* (Gollancz' edition), v. 456.
[2] *Ibid.* 532.
[3] *Asser*, pp. 473, 485, 497.

preachers like Ælfric. Anglo-Saxon prose was the offspring of the encyclopædic education of the Church, and when the use of the national language was, for the time, proscribed by the Norman conqueror in school, council, and law-court, it found its last asylum in the monastery. Anglo-Saxon poetry was still composed in a desultory fashion by native minstrels, but such specimens of their art as we possess have only escaped oblivion by happening, like the *Song of the Battle of Brunanburh*, to be embedded in the dreary prose of some monastic chronicler.

Besides the introduction of a fixed literary standard, natural causes were also at work to undermine the structure of oral minstrelsy. The metrical forms of Anglo-Saxon poetry were adapted to the framework of a language in its "synthetic" stage. On the one hand, the absence of the article and of conjunctions, and the use of case-endings, rather than of prepositions, to mark the relations between objects, gave what may be called a *cumulative* character to the rhythm of the sentence. On the other hand, this normal effect was intensified in metre by the use of alliteration, which served to indicate at once the place of the rhetorical emphasis and of the rhythmical pause. Hence the minstrel's natural tendency was to conduct his narrative through a series of abrupt, energetic clauses, packed with those phrases, in immediate apposition with each other, so frequent in Hebrew poetry, and technically called "parallelisms"; the whole effect being well suited to chanting or recitative. The following may be taken as a good sample of the style:—

Fyrst forð-gewât; flota wæs on yðum,
Bát under beorge. Beomas gearwe
On stefu stigon; streámas wundon,
Sund wið sande. Secgas bæron,
On bearn nacan, beohrte frætwe,
Guð-searo geatolic; guman út scufon,
Weras on wil-sið, wudu bundenne.
Gewât þá ofer wǽg-holm, winde gefýsed,
Flota fámig-heals, fugle gelicost,
Oðþæt ymb ân-tid oðres dogores

Wunden stefna gewaden hæfde,
Þæt þa liðende land gesawon,
Brim-clifu blican, beorgas steápe,
Síde sæ-nessas [1]

In the above passage may be observed examples of many of the synthetic forms of the Anglo-Saxon language: word-endings, marking differences of declension in substantives; differences of number, of gender, and case in substantives and adjectives; of mood and tense in verbs; agreements between substantives and adjectives; and the prefix of the past participle. But even before the Norman Conquest a number of intellectual or phonetic forces were driving themselves like wedges into the compact framework of the ancient harmony, and preparing the decomposed language for the admission of the new metrical forms impressed upon it by the immigration of alien races. The chief of these were the simplification of grammatical forms, the assimilation and contraction of sounds, and the employment of auxiliary words to express relationships originally indicated by internal modifications of a single word.

Under the first head may be reckoned the gradual disappearance of gender in substantives, adjectives, and pronouns. The idea of gender doubtless arises out of a primitive tendency to personify all the appearances of inanimate nature; but, as society advances in intellectual refinement, such distinctions of sex in inanimate objects begin to appear meaningless. Traces of gender may be found even as late as Chaucer; but in the Anglo-Saxon literature, produced within a generation after the Norman Conquest, there are not wanting signs that this mode of

[1] The time flew on; the ship floated on the waves; the bark [lay] under the hill. The seamen with alacrity climbed on to her stern; the stream rolled, the water [dashed] against the sand. The mariners bore a bright freight into the vessel's hold, a well appointed war-array; the crew—men on a volunteer cruise—shoved off the banded bark. Then the foamy-necked cruiser, hurried on by the wind, flew over the sea, most like to a bird, until about the first hour of the next day, the vessel with twisted stem had run [so far] that the mariners saw land, the sea-cliffs glittering—steep mountains, large headlands.—*Beowulf*, 210-223. T. Arnold's translation.

agreement between substantive and adjective is already falling into disuse.

The tendency to assimilate sounds shows itself most strongly in substantives and adjectives, by the disappearance of the various vowel endings before the growing power of the letter *e*. Pressed on the north by the immigration of the Danes, and on the south by the neighbourhood of the Normans, the Anglo-Saxons found an increasing difficulty in communicating their thoughts by means of inflected words. For convenience of intercourse the people, while preserving the stems of words, containing that part of the meaning which all could understand, sought as far as possible to simplify the endings. All-absorbing as Aaron's serpent, the vowel *e* swallowed up the *a* and *u* which, in the early stages of the language, had been used to mark declensions. By the same power it insinuated itself into the termination *as*, which had itself displaced the various endings formerly employed to distinguish the plural from the singular number. After thus disposing of all its rivals, it reigned supreme through several centuries, exercising a predominant influence over the prosody of the language; but gradually yielding itself to the power of contraction, it became torpid and finally mute. These different stages of change may be illustrated in the following words:—

Nom. Sing.	Nom. Plur.
Nama—Namë—Name	Naman—Namës—Names
Wulf—Wolf	Wulfas—Wulfës—Wolvës—Wolves

Among the pronouns the principle of simplification is clearly marked in the fortunes of the demonstrative and relative,

Masculine.	Feminine.	Neuter.
Se { in the Northern Dialect *the* }	Seô	Thæt

which was originally declined with the usual cases in all its genders and in both numbers. Cases and genders, however, gradually dropped out of use, till at last all that was left of the demonstrative pronoun was the masculine

nominative *the*, transformed into the definite article, and the neuter nominative *thæt* (that), preserved in an indeclinable form to discharge demonstrative functions. In its relative sense *se* was supplanted by *hwâ* (who), *hwylce* (which), pronouns used in the old tongue exclusively as interrogatives, but the neuter *thæt* has retained to this day its force as a relative. The feminine *seô*, modified to *scho* and *sheo*, together with the late accusative of *heô*, *hire*, survive in the feminine demonstrative *she*, *her*.

The Anglo-Saxon verb, while preserving more of its ancient structure than the other declinable parts of speech, had to submit to the same general laws which modified the endings of nouns and pronouns. The principal changes through which it passed were—

1. The plural termination of the present indicative, the old forms *eth* or *ath* having been replaced first by *an*, then by *en*, from which *n* soon disappeared, leaving the *e* gradually to become mute.

2. The conversion of many verbs with a *strong* preterite (*i.e.* a preterite formed by a change in the root vowel) into verbs with a *weak* preterite by the addition of the ending *de* or *te* to the old root. Thus even before the Norman Conquest the verb *slapan*, of which the preterite was originally *slêp*, formed that tense as *slepte*, and *fahren* changed its preterite from *for* to *fohrde*. *Wæpde* (wept), for *weopon*, is found in the Lindisfarne Gospels (950 A.D.).

3. The contraction of the preterite in weak verbs, by omitting one of the vowels in the termination *ode* or *ede*. Thus, in Chaucer, we often find the preterite *answérde* accentuated on the penultimate (or, if the final *e* be cut off, on the last) syllable in consequence of the elision of a vowel before the *d*.

4. The contraction of the infinitive by the omission of the final *n*. Before the Norman Conquest the infinitive *drincan* (to drink) had been contracted to *drinca*, the final *a* was afterwards changed into *e*, and this in course of time became mute.

5. The gradual substitution of the termination *ing* for that of *and* in the present participle.

6. The disappearance of the prefix *ge* from the past participle. This change seems to have begun as early as the time of Alfred.

7. The occasional change of the termination of the imperative plural from *ath* into *as* or *es*, which in course of time became mute.[1]

These natural changes produced striking, though gradual, effects on the prosody of the language that was evolved from the Anglo-Saxon. Conybeare remarks on the great number of "Adonic" verses (–◡◡ – –)[2] in Anglo-Saxon alliterative measures. When, through the genius of Chaucer, the French iambic movement was naturalised in the Middle English, the triple movement, inherent in the old style, instinctively gave way before the new tendency. Great numbers of iambuses and trochees were formed, partly by importation of French words, partly by the pronunciation of the final *e* in verbs and nouns, as the symbol of the former inflections. But the dactylic movement remained in a state of suspended animation till the reign of Elizabeth. It was revived by Drayton in his *Battle of Agincourt*, as may be seen from the following rude but vigorous stanza:—

> They now to | fight are gone, |
> Armour on | armour shone, |
> Drum now to | drum did groan, |
> To hear was | wonder, |
> That with the | cries they make |
> The very | earth did quake, |
> Trumpet to | trumpet spake, |
> Thunder to | thunder. |

It is easy to recognise here the movement so effectively used by Tennyson in his "Charge of the Six Hundred."

When the *e*, as the sign of inflection, became mute, the language was left provided with a great number of monosyllables. It was accordingly adapted not only for the dactylic movement, congenital with the Anglo-Saxon,

[1] Very interesting illustrations of these gradual changes will be found in Mr. Kington Oliphant's *Old and Middle English* (1878).

[2] Such as "fugle gelicost" in the extract on p. 106. See Conybeare's *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. lxxi.

but for the converse movement, consisting of anapæstic feet, as for example :—

> The Assýrian came dówn like the wólf on the fóld,
> And his cóhorts were gleáming in púrple and góld,
> And the shéen of their spéars was like stárs on the séa,
> When the blúe wave rolls níghtly on déep Galilée.

We see therefore that the various rhythms, which the English language now contains, are the product equally of the internal changes to which it has been subjected, and of the foreign elements which it has incorporated with the primitive Teutonic stock.

CHAPTER IV

ANGLO-NORMAN POETRY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH VERSE

THE genius of the Normans stood in bold and striking contrast to that of the Saxons. When the latter, leaving their ancient seats on the shores of the German Ocean, had parted company from their Continental kinsmen, and converted themselves into British islanders, a marked change was produced in their character. Firmly rooted in the conquered soil they abandoned their roving habits; their fixed attachment to their national customs in time developed a settled state of law and order; the softening influence of Christianity promoted the refinement of their manners. Under these circumstances, as we have seen, the scôp's inspiration sank, while the more dreamy and meditative elements in the Teutonic nature were nourished in the congenial climate of monasticism, and submitted to the schooling of the Latin Church.

On the other hand the Northmen, in whatever new abodes they might fix themselves, carried with them the spirit of adventure which first drove them forth from the shores of Norway and Denmark. Their temper was alike braced by the air, and impelled by the restlessness, of the element on which so large a part of their life was spent. In the tenth century they had pushed their way up the Seine as far as Paris, and had won for themselves a great portion of the most fertile territory of France. From Normandy, in the following

century, a cadet of one of the less powerful families, with no resources but his valour, had gone forth to establish a kingdom in the very centre of the civilisation of the ancient world. Not content with this great achievement, Robert Guiscard had encountered and overthrown the armies of the Emperor of the East, and, as the champion of the Pope, had forced the Emperor of the West to retire from the gates of Rome. Later in the same century, William the Bastard effected a more enduring conquest, and, displacing the Saxon dynasty, founded the line of sovereigns which has continued to occupy the throne of England. Dauntless in the face of danger, fertile in resource, swift in resolve, the Norman genius was always prompt to understand, to accept, and to turn to its own account, the circumstances with which it had to deal for the moment. Norman builders, stimulated by their contact with the great monuments of the Romans, the Lombards, and the Arabs, brought to the North of Europe those new principles of construction which formed the starting point for the Gothic style of architecture. Anglo-Norman trouvères gave the first impulse to modern poetry, by blending with the older *chansons de geste* the element of romantic love.

When Rollo and his followers conquered Normandy, they brought with them their scalds, who would of course have celebrated the exploits of their leaders in their native language and the Scandinavian style. But it is characteristic of the race, that within a few generations, they had so completely adopted the common speech, as well as the principles of poetical art of the people whom they had subdued, that there was no noticeable difference between their dialect and that of the other provinces of France which used the *langue d'oïl.* The conquest of England brought fresh modifications, and the poetry of the Anglo-Normans exhibits three well-defined stages. In the earliest stage is still to be found something of the spirit of the old scald, joined to the literary taste of the ecclesiastic trained in the learning of the schools. The chief representative of this school is Robert

Wace,[1] a native of Guernsey, born about the beginning of the twelfth century, who died in England in 1184. Wace worked in two different veins, one of which is illustrated in his *Roman de Rou*, and the other in his *Brut*. The former (composed between 1160-1170 A.D.) is a poem of over 16,000 lines, consisting of four main divisions: in the first of which is related the Conquest of Normandy by Rollo; in the second the history of Rollo's reign; in the third the history of William Longsword and of Richard his son; and in the fourth the history of Richard I. down to the sixth year of Henry I. In dealing with these matters, the prime motive of the poet, as of the scald, is to recite the exploits and the genealogy of his chief; but he is also animated by the spirit of the historian, and, though writing in verse, observes a scrupulous accuracy in his record of recent events. Hence his poem, poor in point of art, is valuable as history, and his account of the battle of Hastings has been justly relied on by modern scholars, as furnishing life-like details of the fortunes of the fight.

The *Brut*, on the contrary, worthless as history, is more immediately connected with the development of modern poetry, since it presents the first faint indications of that influence exercised by Celtic imagination on the Teutonic or Scandinavian genius, afterwards so brilliantly illustrated by the cycle of Arthurian romance. Wace's poem is indeed no more than a metrical expansion of the *History* of Geoffrey of Monmouth; but the touches which he has added, recording the institution by Arthur of the Round Table, and of feasts and tourneys, introduce into the growing myth the first glimpse of the spirit of chivalry.[2] He is, however, far from yielding to the wild and romantic impulse of Celtic superstition, and, whether from the scepticism of the scholar, or from a

[1] His name is variously given as Wace, Vaice, Gace, Gasse.

[2] Cp. *Roman de Brut*, 9998-10,042 :—

Fist rois Artur la Ronde Table
Dont Bretons dient mainte fable.

. . . .

Ne tot mensonge, ne tot voir,
Ne tot folor, ne tot savoir,
Tant ont li conteor conté
E li fableor tant fablé
Por leur conte embeleter
Que tot ont fait fable sembler.

certain Northern robustness of mind, he seeks to test the marvels reported to him by the experience of his senses.[1]

The foundations of another cycle of romance were laid about the same time by the Anglo-Norman trouvère, Benoît de Ste More, who had himself been employed by Henry Beauclerc to write the history of Normandy, but who now turned his infant historical genius in a different direction. His imagination was attracted by the history of the fate of Troy, written by Dares the Phrygian. The minute details in which this work abounds, and which to a more critical sense would have shown it to be a pretentious literary forgery, were to Benoît proofs of the author's accuracy; he accordingly set himself, in the joyous spirit of a trouvère, to convert into the language of poetry the text of what he conceived to be a veracious history. In his hands the Trojan romance swelled into about 30,000 lines, and was followed by the *Roman de Thèbes*, containing the story of Eteocles and Polynices, as told by Statius, and transmuted in the alembic of Scandinavian fancy.

The second, and most important period of Anglo-Norman poetry extends from the close of the reign of Henry II. to the reign of Henry III., and is characterised by the full development of the principle of romance. This class of poem may be described as being the old *chanson de geste*, modified by the assimilation of (1) the machinery of Celtic mythology; (2) the love-adventures of the Greek novels; (3) the religious and chivalrous spirit of the Crusades—various, and sometimes opposite, influences, each of which deserves to be separately considered

1. After the conquest of Normandy the Northmen, with their wonted intellectual activity, inquired with

[1] He was exceedingly anxious to see the wonders of which he heard in the forest Broceliande, where was the tomb of Merlin, and went thither with great expectations which, however, were grievously disappointed—

interest about the mythology and poetry of the country. From very early times the testimony of numerous poets and historians, Latin and Greek, shows that the interpreters and preservers of Celtic tradition were the bards.[1] We have equally good reason for believing that the bards' vehicle of poetical expression was the lay.[2] As to the functions of these poets, the subject matter of their lays seems, in respect of warlike exploits and tribal genealogy, to have strongly resembled the art of the Teutonic races; though, from their close association with the Druids, it is probable that their references to religion were more refined and metaphysical. Of their old superstitions few traces remain, but one invaluable passage in ancient literature attests the vitality of Celtic folk lore. Pomponius Mela thus describes certain marvellous maidens in the isle of Seine, reverenced by the ancient Celts:—

"Sena, an island in the British sea opposite to the coasts of the Orismici, is remarkable for an oracle, whose priests, sanctified by perpetual virginity, are reported to be nine in number; they call them Gallizenæ, and believe them to be endowed with singular powers, which enable them to raise the winds and seas by their enchantment, to transform themselves into any animals they please, to cure wounds which in the hands of others are beyond the power of healing, to foresee and predict future events; but to be devoted exclusively to the service of sailors, and to those who come expressly for the purpose of consulting them."[3]

From this we may conclude with something like certainty that the Fées, or Fays, or Fairies, who play so prominent a part in the Arthurian romances, in *Partheno-*

[1] See authorities cited by the Abbé de la Rue in his *Essais Historiques sur les Bardes*, etc., p. 45 (edition of 1834).

[2] Hos tibi versiculos, dent barbara carmina Leudos,
Sic, variante tropo, laus sonet una viro.
Venantius Fortunatus, Lib. 7, *Epistola ad Lupum*.

[3] Pomponius Mela, iii. 6 (48). Compare with this the very curious passage in the *Vita Merlini*, attributed to Geoffrey of Monmouth, describing the *Insula Pomorum*, or Fortunate Island, where, he says, dwell nine sisters who possess the same powers as those described by Pomponius Mela. The eldest is named Morgen, and by her King Arthur is, in time, to be healed of his wound. *Galfridi de Monemuta Vita Merlini* (F. Michel and Thomas Wright, 1837), v. 916. This is the germ of the legend of Avalon.

pæus of Blois, and in the *Lays* of Marie of France—the Morgan of early, the Alcina of later fable—supernatural beings, who practise magic, control the elements, and fall in love with mortals, are essentially the creatures of Celtic fancy. Nor can we doubt that the landscape of romance, so delicate, mysterious, phantom-like, evanescent,—the forest of Broceliande, the fountain of Barenton, the island of Avalon, the marvels witnessed in the *Voyage of St. Brandan*, probably the first of the genuine romances,—derives its character from the same source, rather than from the darker and more savage Scandinavian temper which has stamped itself on the scenery of *Beowulf*. Lastly, we may assume with some confidence that the names, and even the outlines of action and character, in the Anglo-Norman romances, are of Celtic origin, and represent vague recollections of history preserved by the oral traditions of the tribes.

2. We must be careful, however, not to impute to tradition and national temperament elements in romance which may be more reasonably ascribed to the operation of literature and invention. And to this latter I should certainly refer the introduction into romance of the representation of love, for the purpose of heightening the interest and adding to the intricacy of the fable. In the old pagan mythology love, in the romantic sense of the word, occupied a scarcely more prominent place than any other principle of human action, and when it did appear, was usually associated, as in the stories of Phædra, Medea, and Dido, with unnatural affection or furious passion. There was not much more room for it in the minstrelsy of the German tribes; the action of *Beowulf* is as little affected by the sentiment as that of the *Iliad* But when these nations were converted to Christianity, and their manners were gradually softened, a great change began. The presence of a vast disturbing force was observed in a passion which might lead men to violate the sacraments of the Church, or their feudal obligations, in a hundred cases that would not have arisen under the easy code of polytheistic morality. And the violence of this moral

conflict was increased because, partly from primary Teutonic instinct, partly from the lyrical enthusiasm of the troubadours, chivalrous society, male and female, had, by the twelfth century, come to doubt whether, under certain circumstances, the promptings of lawless passion ought not to be regarded as the impulse of a semi-religious devotion. Hence the idea of love began to associate itself with epic and dramatic possibilities of which ancient fiction knew nothing.

The new conception, however, might have failed thus early to embody itself in a literary form, if it had not lighted on a fitting model. When the early Crusaders with their attendant minstrels passed through Constantinople, they must, it can scarcely be doubted, have become acquainted with the Greek novel. Here they would have found precisely the spark that was needed to kindle their inflammable imagination. The stories of Theagenes and Chariclea, Clitophon and Leucippe, Ismenias and Ismene, all turning on the sufferings and adventures of lovers, suggested to the quick fancy of the trouvère how greatly the introduction of such matter would enliven the action of the old *chansons de geste.* To read or to hear was to imitate. In time the authors of the Romances even went so far as to reproduce the prose form of their Greek models, and in their narratives the exploits of Arthur against Saxon and Roman, long blended with the tales of Merlin's enchantments, were relieved by the episodes of the loves of Lancelot and Guenevere, of Tristram and Iseult.[1]

3. Generally speaking, the prose romances of the thirteenth and following centuries reflect vividly the change produced in the imagination and manners of European society by the Crusades. By those wars the different nations of Europe, now divided by opposing aims and interests, were vividly reminded that they were united by a common faith and common origin. The memories of the days of warlike wandering were renewed; religious instinct was kindled into a passionate fervour; while, in the face of the common danger to which

[1] See also pp. 441-2.

all private rights were exposed in the general exodus, every man perceived that it was necessary to strengthen the bonds of feudal obligation. Hence the code of chivalrous honour was summed up under three main heads: the observation of oaths among knights, the succour of women in distress, and attendance at mass. In these various respects the romance writer paid due attention to the tastes of his hearers. The Crusader, fresh from his wanderings in the Holy Land, followed with sympathy the imaginary adventures of the knights of the Round Table; his feelings of mystical piety were satisfied by the legend of the Holy Grail; in the numerous tales of the rescue of distressed damsels he saw an image of his own duties towards women; and in the subtle questions of casuistry, raised by the relations of Tristram and Lancelot with the wives of their feudal lords, problems which interested the whole of contemporary society were presented to him in an ideal form.[1] The chief authors of the Arthurian romances were Robert de Borron, to whom we owe the *Roman du St. Graal* and the *History of Merlin;* and Walter Map or Mapes, who wrote the *Queste du St. Graal, Lancelot du Lac,* and the *Mort Artus.* At a later period Lucas de Gast produced the celebrated romance of *Tristram*, and Hélie de Borron completed the cycle with the *History of Gyron le Courtois.* The work last named was composed as late as the reign of Henry III.

The third stage in the development of romantic poetry is marked by the works of Marie of France, a poetess of remarkable genius, of whose life and time we unfortunately know no more than the few stray hints she has let fall about herself in her *Lays* and *Fables* Her earliest work was in all probability a translation of the fables of Phædrus, or as she entitled it *Ysopet*, which she tells us she "set herself to

[1] This situation is constantly repeated in the *Lays* of Marie of France. By the laws of chivalry any knight who injured the honour of his lord, while in his service, was guilty of felony; a vassal who offended in the same way was guilty of *Desfeodalité*, and was liable to the loss of his fief. The "Lay of Eliduc," by Marie, turns on the former point, and a similar complication is introduced into the "Lai de Lanval," v. 360; and the "Lai de Graalent," 463-476. Lancelot, being Arthur's vassal, was guilty of *Desfeodalité*.

make for the love of Count William, the bravest in this kingdom, and to translate it from English into Romance."[1] "Count William" was probably William Long-Sword, the brave Earl of Salisbury, natural son of Henry II., who died in 1226; and the reputation Marie obtained through this work may have caused Henry III. to order her to publish the collection of her *Lays*.[2] Whichever was her earlier composition, Marie says that, before undertaking her *Lays*, she had thought, like all her predecessors, of "making some *good history*, and translating it from Latin into Romance."[3] But finding that this path was too well-worn, she resolved to take as her models the Breton lays, to which she had so often listened, and to preserve the memory of the old Celtic traditions in the Norman tongue.[4]

It is a little doubtful how much liberty Marie allowed herself in her versions of the poems which she professed to reproduce. In the opening of the "Lai de l'Épine" she seems to wish us to believe that her own lays are faithful translations from MSS., which were actually in existence in the monastery of St. Aaron at Caerleon.[5] But she speaks ambiguously, and as she hastens to add that there can b[illegible] question about the *oral* authority of the lays, I sh[illegible] inclined to conclude that her reference to

MSS. was merely a device, resembling Chaucer's when he seeks to gain credit for his *Troilus and Cressida* by imputing the original to Lollius, an imaginary Latin historian. This opinion is confirmed by the short poetical advertisement which Marie appends to each of her stories, saying that out of the same subject matter the Bretons had made a lay. In any case the style, the colour, in a word, the character, of the poems are all her own, and are such as could only have been imparted to them by a writer intimately acquainted with the most refined tastes and manners of the time.

The great merit of Marie as a poet lies in the skill with which she has blended the opposing elements of the *fabliau* and the romance. Her tales are often no longer than those of the *Decameron*, but she has contrived to animate each of them with all the interest of a complicated drama. The attention of the reader is always arrested by the central situation; and we are not surprised to learn from one of her rivals that she was especially successful in pleasing the female part of her audience.[1] Of the fifteen lays ascribed to her thirteen turn immediately on love, and the other two on a marvel of nature and a striking dramatic situation[2] Many of the tales are enlivened by incidents representing the transformation of men into the lower animals, of magical enchantments, and other episodes of fairy machinery. The sentiments and speeches assigned to the different actors are full of a delicate propriety which adds greatly to the interest of the story.[3] Equally admirable are the descriptions, whether the objects be of nature or art, for Marie, like a true woman, loved to please the imagination

[1] Denys Pyramus, author of *Parthenopæus of Blois*, and one of the most popular poets of the time, says of her in his *Vie de Saint Edmond*, cited by Roquefort, vol. i. p. 8—

> Ses Lais soleient as Dames plaire,
> De joie les oient et de gré,
> Car sunt selun lor volenté.

[2] Viz. "Bisclaveret" and the "Lai del Fresne." The situation in the latter bears a curious resemblance to the story of Griselda.

[3] This is perhaps specially observable in the "Lai d'Eliduc," where the situation is one of peculiar difficulty.

of her female hearers, only recently introduced to the luxuries of the East, by dwelling in her verse on the silks of Constantinople, the purple cloth of Alexandria, basins of enamelled gold, mantles of ermine, and beds carved in gold, inlaid with precious stones, cypress, and ivory, in value above the price of a whole castle. In a word, she may be described without exaggeration as the founder of the *art* of poetry both in France and England. As a fabulist she showed the way to La Fontaine. As a story-teller she joined the brilliance and vivacity of Boccaccio to a chivalrous refinement of feeling which is too often absent from the tales of the *Decameron*. Chaucer himself studied with care and advantage the style of a poet who had preceded him by one hundred and fifty years.

While the genius of Anglo-Norman poetry thus expanded in the patronage of a splendid court, and under the intellectual stimulus of the Crusades, and while it drew fresh nourishment from the various sources of Latin, Celtic, and Oriental imagination, Saxon literature sank into torpor and decay. Though "Englisc" was still the language of the vast majority of the people, it was banished from use in school, laws, law-court, court, and castle. Its last literary asylum was the monastery. Since the restoration of the strictness of Benedictine rule under the direction of Dunstan, there had been a great revival of monasticism in England, and many of the regular clergy were patriotically anxious to preserve the standards of the national literature, as well as to promote the interests of the convent to which they belonged. Even here, however, there was little opportunity for arresting the progress of decline. The genius of the old poetry had been sapped by the introduction of Christianity, and the intellectual energy of the race had been turned by the efforts of Alfred into the channel of prose, without however being recruited by many fresh sources of invention. Except in the way of histories, homilies, and translations, there were few compositions in Anglo-Saxon prose; and for the third class even of these, there was, in consequence of the decline of general culture after the death of Alfred

but little demand. The Saxon clergy were trained to express themselves in Latin as well as in their native language, and therefore needed no translations; the homily, where it was not simply transcribed from ancient models, was naturally affected by the forms of contemporary speech; to chronicle current events became, accordingly, almost the only surviving motive of composition. A valuable example of these histories remains in the Peterborough Chronicle; but its necessarily narrow range of interests, its corrupted vocabulary, and rude syntax, are the outward signs of an expiring literature. The grammatical framework of the Anglo-Saxon language was perishing from disuse.

Two influences from outside conspired to hasten its dissolution. One was the rapid change in the current speech of the country, to which the homilist in his sermons strove to conform, and to which, whenever he reduced his addresses to writing, he adapted, as well as he could, his system of orthography. This tendency is best illustrated in the *Ormulum*, a series of metrical homilies composed by Ormin, or Orm, a canon regular of the order of St. Augustine, who must have written in the northern part of the country about the beginning of the thirteenth century. The object of Ormin was to convey instruction to the people by means of homilies, and, with this end in view, he paraphrased the Gospel of each day in the Anglian dialect, adding an exposition of the doctrine to be derived from it. The opening of one of these homilies will serve to illustrate the author's style, and will show the extent to which he had departed from primitive literary models[1]:—

An preost was onn Herodes dazz,
   Amang Judisken theode,
And he wass, wiss to fulle soth,
   zehatenn Zacharize,
And haffde an duhhtiz wif that wass
   Off Aarones dohtress;

[1] A priest there was in the days of Herod, among the people of the Jews, and he was, certainly in full sooth, called Zacharias; and he had a virtuous wife that was of the daughters of Aaron; and she was, certainly

And ȝho wass, wiss to fulle soth,
  Elysabæth ȝehatenn.
And teȝȝ wærenn biforennn Godd
  Rihhtwise menn and gode.
For eytherr here ȝede swa
  Rihht affterr Godess lare,
Thatt nan mann noht ne fand onn hemm
  To tælenn ne to wreȝenn,
Noff whatt menn mihhtenn habbenn nith
  Ne wratthe ȝæn heore owwther.

There is not a single word in this passage derived from the French; the vocabulary of the language is still completely Teutonic. On the other hand we see that the inflections of words have in some instances disappeared, and, what is far more remarkable, the syntax has undergone something like a revolution. The words now follow almost exactly the order of the thought; and the sentences and clauses, instead of being cumulative as in the old language, are linked to each other by conjunctions. Lastly, alliteration is discarded; and though the verse does not rhyme, yet in the number and fall of its accents, and in the equalisation of the number of syllables in each verse, it anticipates the "ballad metre" of later days. The *Ormulum* is a valuable literary monument, in so far as it shows the secret process of reconstruction by which the Anglo-Saxon language was being transformed, and the influence indirectly exercised, by the iambic rhythm of Anglo-Norman verse, on the ear even of those who were least affected by French literary models.

Ormin addressed himself to a homely audience. A different tendency is reflected in the verse of Layamon, who must have been Ormin's contemporary, but whose *Brut* exhibits, in a far more striking and interesting manner, the gradual fusion of the Norman with the Saxon genius. Layamon was the parish priest of Arley, near Bewdley, in Worcestershire, and his poem, written in the Mercian dialect, was evidently intended for a wider and

in full sooth, called Elisabeth: and they were before God righteous folk and good; for each of them walked so rightly after God's lore, that no man might find in them aught to blame or accuse, nor anything for which men might have envy or wrath against either.—*Ormulum, Homiliæ secundum Lucam*, 1.

more instructed circle of readers than those who listened to the homilies of the Anglian canon. At the opening of *Brut* he recites his authorities, endeavouring, like all mediæval poets, to claim more historical weight for his performance than is justly due to it. His materials, he says, were obtained from a book in English by St. Bede, from another in Latin made by Sts. Albin and Austin, and from a third in French made by a clerk called Wace. From Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, which he doubtless read in King Alfred's translation, he took nothing but the story of Gregory the Great and the Anglo-Saxons; the book of Albinus does not exist in a separate form; Layamon's sole original is, in fact, Wace's poem of the same name, which, as has been already said, is itself a metrical rendering of the *History* of Geoffrey of Monmouth. But the French text is treated with such true Anglo-Saxon expansiveness, that its meagre substance is swelled into a narrative of about 30,000 lines; and, though Layamon follows Wace's lead closely enough, he does not hesitate to introduce historical episodes of his own,[1] or to touch here and there the Latin-Celtic legend with a colouring of Teutonic mythology.[2]

In many passages of the *Brut* the spirit of the old scôp seems to revive, and to produce effects resembling those found in Cædmon's *Paraphrase*. As the simple Scripture narrative of patriarchal life touched primitive chords in the Anglo-Saxon imagination, causing it to transform the historic style of Genesis and Exodus into the language and imagery of minstrelsy, so Layamon, a genuine poet, felt the charm of Celtic romance even through the stolid disguise of Wace's version, and gave it new life in the heroic verse of his own nation. One of the

[1] Among others he inserts the story of St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne, and the killing of Gratian by Ælfwald and Ethelbald, "churls" of East Anglia.—Layamon, 11,917, 12,253 (Sir F. Madden's edition).

[2] Arthur marching upon Bath arms himself for battle "Then did he put on his helmet embroidered with steel, which an elvish smith made for him with his noble craft; he was called Wygar, who wittily wrought it." *Brut*, 21,130. This seems to be a reminiscence of the Teutonic legend of Wieland the Smith.

most noticeable features in his narrative is its dramatic character, which furnishes a striking contrast to the bald manner of Wace, even where the latter has himself dramatised the simple narrative of Geoffrey. Take for example the passage in which each poet tells the story of King Lear's treatment by his daughter Goneril. This is Wace:—

"Goneril was too avaricious, and thought great scorn of her father, because he maintained so great a retinue, and did nothing for it. Much was she burdened with the cost; often to her lord she said: 'What are we to do with this crowd of men? By my faith, sire, we are mad in that we have brought here so many people. Nor does my father know what he is doing; he is entered into mad riot; he is old and doting. Evil be to him who shall keep him for a year, or shall feed so many people for him. His servants strive with ours, and ours run away from them. Who could endure so great a press? He is false and his folk perverse. There is never a man who serves him willingly, for the more he gets the more he wastes. Very wrong is he who assembles so many people: there are too many of them; let them go on their way. My father has a train of fifty; from henceforth let them be forty in all with us; or let him depart with all his people; what does it matter to us?'"[1]

Wace then proceeds to relate crudely how King Lear was turned out of doors, and obliged to go to Regan. But Layamon, though paraphrasing Wace's text, tells the story in a very different style:—

"Then it came to pass soon afterwards that Goneril bethought her what she might do. Very ill it seemed to her with regard to her father's state, and she began to complain of it to Maglan, her lord, and said to him in bed as they lay together, 'Say to me, my lord—thou art dearest of men to me—methinks my father is no whit sane; no worship he knows; he has lost his wit; methinks the old man will dote anon. He keeps here forty knights day and night; he maintains here these thanes and all their men, hounds, and hawks: therefore

[1] Wace, *Brut*, 1905.

we have harm; and nowhere do they speed, and ever they spend; and all the good we do them they blithely receive it, and only thanklessness comes to us for our good deeds. They do us much dishonour: our men they beat; my father has too many idle men. All the fourth part let us thrust forth; thirty is enough for him to wait at table. Ourselves have cooks to go to the kitchen; ourselves have porters and cupbearers enough. Leave we some of these many folk to go where they will; as ever I hope for mercy I will suffer it no more.' This heard Maglan that his queen spake thus, and he answered her with noble speech: 'Lady, thou art very wrong; hast not thou riches enough? but keep thy father in bliss, he will not live long. For if foreign kings heard the tidings that we did this to him, they would reproach us. But suffer him to have his folk as he will; and this is my counsel, for soon hereafter he will be dead, and we also shall have in our hand the half of his kingdom.' Then said Goneril: 'Lord, be thou still; let me do everything and I will send them away.' She sent with her snares to the knights' house; she bade them go their way, for she would feed them no more; many of the thanes, many of the men that were come thither with Lear the king. This heard King Lear, therefore he was very wroth. Then spake the king with woful words, and thus said the king, sorrowful in mood: 'Woe worth the man that hath land with honour and giveth it to his child while he yet may hold it, for oft it happens that he repents thereof'"[1]

Layamon, who was stirred thus deeply by the genius of the ancient Saxon poetry, naturally sought to mould his matter in the traditional forms of song. But his metrical style remains a striking monument of the inward changes wrought in the language since it had passed from the lips of the singer to the pen of the literary composer. It was not only that terminations had been assimilated, genders confused, inflections dropped, the weak ending of the preterite tense substituted for the internal change of

[1] Layamon, *Brut*, 3277.

the vowel: the whole character of the metrical sentence had been altered by the introduction of the article, by the frequent use of conjunctions, and by the constant association of the preposition "to" with the infinitive mood. The abrupt, energetic effects of the ancient recitation were modified to suit the literary style of the historian, and the rhythmical period was broken up by the insertion of numerous wedges, in the shape of small auxiliary words, which pointed the logic of the thought, while they destroyed the compactness of the syntax.

In a measure distinctively Teutonic the influence of French verse is of course scarcely perceptible; Layamon's vocabulary contains scarcely more foreign elements than Ormin's. The laws of alliteration, however, are not strictly observed; in many verses the dominant letter is capriciously distributed; in others it is altogether absent; and the alliterative couplet is often replaced by a rhyming one. Compared with *Beowulf*, the metrical structure of the *Brut* resembles those debased forms of architecture in which the leading external features are reproduced long after the reason for their invention has been forgotten.

Ormin had done something to approximate the movement of Anglo-Saxon to the cadence of Anglo-Norman verse. Layamon, by catching his inspiration from a French history of what was now the native country of both races, had helped to propagate among his countrymen a new feeling of poetical patriotism. But a wider and stronger influence was needed to bring the stubborn Saxon genius into perfectly familiar relations with French literary models. That influence was supplied by the encyclopædic training of the Latin Church. In the monastery the devotion of the Saxon monk to Rome, and the Norman zeal for orthodoxy, could join in frank alliance, and each was affected in the same way by the educational discipline which there prevailed. From the beginning of the eleventh century a great intellectual movement had been expanding the aims of the monastic schools. They still adhered with tenacity to the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, and to the authority of

the early Fathers, but the temper of the age had given that first impulse to the study of mathematical and physical science, which was carried on with ardour by the fathers of scholastic Philosophy. One of the favourite subjects for treatment in Latin was the *Computus*, which dealt with the divisions of time, especially in their relations to the festivals of the Church; *Physiologi* in various forms were frequently produced; at the beginning of the twelfth century Saxon writers were acquainted with the science of the Arabs; and by the middle of the same century John of Salisbury showed himself equal to a review of the various systems of ancient philosophy.

Stimulated by this intellectual atmosphere Norman and Saxon scholars rivalled each other in reproducing in their own vernacular tongues the learning they had acquired from Latin texts. In the early years of the twelfth century Philip de Thaun of Normandy wrote a *Computus* in French verse of three accents, and a few years afterwards a *Bestiaire* in lines partly of six syllables and partly of eight syllables[1] An English *Bestiary* made its appearance not long after the period of Ormin, composed in verse which evidently contains the germ of the octosyllabic measure, mixed however with remains of the alliterative principle.[2] The matter of this book is borrowed entirely from the *Physiologus* of Theobaldus Episcopus, and consists of descriptions of animals such as the lion, the eagle, the serpent, the fox, the ant, the spider, the whale, the elephant, the turtle, and the panther, with short allegorical applications of their attributes to things human and divine.[3] As the metrical forms of the Latin original are very varied, comprising hexameters, spurious Sapphics, and rhyming measures, it is not unlikely that the versification of the English version is modelled on that of the French *Bestiaire;* but there are English poems, certainly as old as the first half of the thirteenth century, which, evidently

[1] See Wright, *Popular Treatises on Science in the Middle Ages.* The [illegible]

[illegible] 133

[illegible] *heobaldi Episcopi de* [illegible]

springing from a monastic source, may have rather imitated rhythmical movements in the Latin language. Such is the interesting *Moral Ode*, the oldest MS. of which dates back to A.D. 1250, but to which competent authorities have assigned still higher antiquity. This poem has an iambic movement of seven accents, contained within fourteen or fifteen syllables, resembling the metre of the *Ormulum*, except that the couplets are linked with rhymes, as in the following example:—

Ich am eldre than ich wes · a winter and eke on lore.
Ich welde more than ich dude · my wyt auhte beo more.
Wel longe ich habbe child ibeo · a werke and eke on dede.
Thah ich beo of wynter old · to yong ich am on rede.
Unneth lif ich habbe ilad · and yet me thinkth ich lede.
Hwenne ich me bethencke · ful sore ich me adrede.[1]

In some respects the Latin language provided the Anglo-Saxon, in its period of transition, with a more suitable model than the French, since the former, having preserved its synthetic framework, furnished, like the Saxon, a great number of double rhymes; it also suggested to the new English poets the form of the stanza in which masculine and feminine rhymes alternate, as in this *Orison to the Virgin Mary*:—

Thu art hele and lif and liht,
And helpest all mon-kunne:
Thu us havest well i-diht;
Thu ȝeve us weole and wunne;
Thu brohtest dai and Evë niht,
Heo brohte woht, thou broghtest riht,
Thu almesse and heo sunne.
Bi-side to me, lavedi bright,
Hwenne ich shall wende heonne,
So wel thu miht.[2]

[1] I am older than I was in winters as well as in learning; I know more than I did; my wit ought to be more. Full long have I been a child in work and also in deed: though I be old in winters, I am too young in counsel. Uneasy is the life I have led, and still methinks lead; when I think on it I am sore afraid.—Morris, *Old English Miscellany*, p. 58.

[2] Thou art healing, and life, and light, and helpest all mankind. Thou hast well clothed us; thou givest us weal and joy; thou broughtest day and Eve night; she brought woe, thou broughtest right: thou mercy and she sin. Look upon me, lady bright, when I shall go hence, as well thou mightst.—*Ibid.* p. 160.

French influence, however, undoubtedly determined the important question of the distribution of the accent in the infant English metres, as may be seen from the prevalence in our early poetry of verse of three accents, from the reduplication of which arose the "Alexandrine," and of the octosyllabic line of four accents, which, till the close of the mediæval period, remained the most popular measure in the language. The beginnings of Alexandrine verse may be noted in the following stanza from a poem on "Domesday" of the thirteenth century:—

Hwenne ich thencke of Domesday
  Full sore ich may adrede:
Ther shal after his werk
  Uych mon fongen mede:
Ich habbe Crist agult
  Wyth thouhtes and wyth dede
Louerd Crist, Godes Sune,
  Hwat is me to rede?[1]

The earliest work in which we find the simple octosyllabic couplet used with any degree of artistic skill is the remarkable poem called *The Hule and the Nightingale*, a composition which deserves attention for other than metrical reasons. In almost all the surviving English poetry of the thirteenth century the influence of monastic education predominates. The subjects selected for metrical treatment are either of an exclusively religious nature, consisting, as we have seen, chiefly of homilies, hymns to the Virgin, and thoughts on the Last Judgment, or involve such scientific topics—Bestiaries and Calendars—as fell within the circle of ecclesiastical study. The treatment of these subjects is for the most part conventional. Here and there, no doubt, particularly in poems expressive of the love of Christ or devotion to the Virgin, strong individual feeling prevails, and, as in the stanza from the *Orison to the Virgin* cited above, produces, on an imperfect metrical instrument, strains of a peculiar sweetness and melody. But, as a rule, the motive of composition is

1 [illegible] each man [illegible] Christ with [illegible] counsel?

no higher than a wish to imitate, in vernacular diction and verse, ideas which first impressed themselves on the mind of the writer in a Latin form. In *The Hule and the Nightingale*, however, we make the acquaintance of a mind which has attempted to think for itself, and an invention capable of shaping discursive fancies and sentiments in a poetical mould.

The poem is framed on a regular design. A nightingale, sitting on a bough covered with blossom, perceives close by her an owl on an old stock, and forthwith begins to abuse him for his general habits and his appearance. The owl replies, and both parties resolve to refer their dispute to "Maister Nichole of Guldeford," as being a man well skilled in the judgment of such questions. Far, however, from bringing the matter at once before the arbitrator, they proceed to fight it out in good set terms and in alternate speeches, the nightingale's main attack being directed against the owl's ill-omened song and dark and solitary habits, while the owl dwells on the idle singing of his adversary, and on all the evils that flow from it. Upon this latter point the nightingale is ready with her defence[1]:—

"Hule, thu axest me," ho seide,
"ȝif ich kon eni other dede
Bute singen in sume [? sumer] tide,
An bringe blesse for an wide.
Wi axestu of craftes mine?
Betere is min on than alle thine;
Betere is o song of mine muthe,
Than al that euer thi kun kuthe;
An lust, ich telle the warevore.
Wostu to than man was ibore?
To thare blisse of houene riche,
Thar euere is song and murȝthe iliche;
Thither fundeth everich man
That enithing of gode kan.
Vor thi me singeth in holi chirche,
An clerkes ginneth songes wirche,

[1] "Owl, thou askest me," she said, "if I can do anything else but sing in the summer time and bring bliss far and wide. Why askest thou of my skill? Better is my one than thy all. Better is one song of my mouth than all that ever thy kind knoweth; and list, I tell thee wherefore. Knowest thou for what man was born? For the rich bliss of heaven, where there is ever song and mirth in like manner. Thither goeth every man that knows anything of good. Therefore men sing in holy church, and clerks begin the

That man i-thence bi the songe
Wider he shal; an thar bon longe,
That he the murȝthe ne vorȝete
Ac thereof thenche and biȝete,
An nime ȝeme of chirche stevene,
Hu murie is the blisse of houene."

The owl, however, is not to be beaten [1]:—

"Thu seist that thu singist mankunne,
An techest hom that hi fundieth honne,
Up to the songe that ever ilest;
Ac hit is alre wunder mest
That thu darst liȝe so opeliche.
Wenest thu hi bringe so liȝtliche
To Godes riche al singinge?
Nai, nai! hi shulle wel aunde
That hi mid longe wope mote
Of hore sunnen bidde bote,
Ar hi mote euer kume thare.
Ich rede thi that men bo ȝare,
An more wepe thane singe
That fundeth to than houen kinge;
Vor nis no man witute sunne,
Vor thi he mot, ar he wende honne,
Mid teres and mid wope, bete
That him bo sur that er was swete
Tharto ich helpe God hit wot!
Ne singe ich hom no foliot.
For al me song is of longinge,
An imand sumdel mid woninge,
That mon bi me him bithenche
That he grom for his unwrenche.
Mid mine songe ich him pulte
That ghe grom for his gulte."

The debate is continued with great spirit on both sides; among other arguments, the owl accuses the nightingale of using her powers of singing for the purpose of seduction, while the nightingale hints that the owl's claims to superior knowledge bring him under the suspicion of witchcraft. Throughout the dispute the owl appears as the more powerful logician, but matters are made equal by the nightingale's gift of invective, till at last, when the latter has exhausted her ammunition, she begins to sing a song of triumph, summoning all the other birds to her assistance. Greatly enraged at these feminine tactics, the owl threatens to use violence, but is deterred by the interposition of the wren, who suggests to the disputants that it is time for them to submit their quarrel to Master Nichole. To this they agree, and go to look for their judge at his house at Portisham in Dorsetshire; but as to the ultimate decision of the dispute the author professes his inability to give the reader any information.

From this account it will be seen that the poet has, with considerable art, applied the established form of French metrical composition known as the *Disput* or *Débat* to the scientific matter, with its accompanying symbolism, found in the Latin Bestiaries or *Physiologi*. In particular he seems to have studied the *De Naturis Rerum* of Alexander of Neckham, a work of the early part of the thirteenth century. What the precise intention of his allegory was we can only conjecture. It is plain that he was in orders, and, to judge from the two passages cited above, which summarise the spirit of the argument on either side, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the dispute was meant to represent the opposite opinions of the strict monastic party, on the one side, and of the more latitudinarian among the secular, and even the regular, clergy, on the other.[1] There is also an evident personal

mingled sometimes with wailing, that man by means of me may bethink him to be sorrowful for his wicked deeds; with my songs I urge him to be sorry for his sin" (*Hule and Nightingale*, 847-72).—Wright, *Early English Poetry*, vol. ii.

[1] Other passages in the poem seem to confirm this view. Thus the nightingale having observed that the owl is hateful to God and to all who wear linen, the owl at once answers, "stark and strong"—"What! art thou hooded? or cursest thou all unheeding? I wot thou doest so for the

feeling at work, for at the conclusion of the poem the birds, uniting in their praise of Master Nichole, complain of the bishop and the rich patrons in the diocese for not having given preferment to so just and learned a man.[1] But whatever the meaning of the writer may have been, he was certainly a poet capable of forming a clear conception of his subject, and of giving expression to it in a well-proportioned composition. The characters and arguments of the disputing birds are well distinguished, and the slight dramatic touches with which the narrative is enlivened are in excellent taste.[2] Not only has the author shown real power of invention in adapting the allegorical spirit of the Bestiary to his own ends, but he has understood how to combine the clerical spirit of these manuals with the romance of the Breton lay. When he borrows for his argument an anecdote from Alexander of Neckham, he shows an appreciation of the improvements made in the story by the colours added in the version of Marie of France.[3] The influence of French models is

sake of a priest's dwelling. I know not if thou canst sing mass: enough ... ie old envy that thou cursedst me at ... nightingale's argument as to the use ... of Neckham, *De Naturis Rerum*, ... itam claustralium pro oculis cordis constituis, noctes cum diebus in laudem divinam expendentium?"

[1] The owl says that rich men are in the habit of putting their children into livings to enjoy the tithe (*H. and N.* 1768-76)

[2] The poet, for example, shows a great sense of propriety in making the *wren* bid the combatants "keep the peace," for in the legends of the Middle Ages the wren claimed to be king of the birds.

[3] He had undoubtedly read Alexander of Neckham's chapter on the Nightingale in the *De Naturis Rerum*, for he says, "Once thou didst sing, I know well where, by a bower, and wouldest lure the lady to an evil love; and thou didst sing both high and low, and leddest her to do shame and wrong of her body The lord soon perceived that and set lime and gins, well I wot, to trap thee. Thou didst soon come into the snare, thou wast taken in a gin though it repented thee of thy misdeeds Thou hadst no other judgment or law, but wast torn to pieces by wild horses." Compare with this Neckham's —"Miles enim quidam nimis zelotes philomenam quatuor equis distrahi præcipit eo quod secundum ipsius assertionem animum uxoris suæ nimis demulcens eam ad illiciti amoris compulisset illecebras." But the detail of the snares is from Marie de France's "Lai du Laustic," 95—

Il n'ot Vallet en sa meisun
Ne face engin, reis, a lasenus,
Puis le mettent par le vergier,
Ni ot codre, ne chastaimer,
U il ne mettent laz u glu,
Tant que pris l'unt e retenu.

indeed very noticeable throughout the poem, not indeed in the vocabulary, which is singularly archaic, but in the syntax, where the words closely follow the order of the thought, and in the rhythm, which, both in the distribution of the accent and in the number of the syllables in each verse, shows a careful study of the style of Marie.

The Hule and the Nightingale is written in Southern English, and must have been composed in the early part of the reign of Edward I., since Henry III. is spoken of as dead.[1] The work of an author living in that part of the country where literary refinement was the most widely spread, and which was readily accessible to Continental influence, it shows, as was to be expected, the strong interest which Englishmen were beginning to feel in the questions now agitating every country in Europe, and is indeed, in many respects, a curious anticipation of the line of thought followed by Jean de Meung, in his satirical addition to the *Romance of the Rose*.[2]

In the meantime a very different set of causes was bringing about a coalition between the Norman and Saxon elements in other parts of the country. Northumbria and East Anglia, while they had been more exposed than Wessex to the ravages of the Danes, had for this reason been less affected by the spirit of literary cultivation encouraged by Alfred. The inhabitants, however, retained the old religious fervour which had characterised them since the time of Cædmon, and this native impulse was heightened and promoted when the Danish immigrants were also converted to Christianity.

After the Norman Conquest large grants of land in Yorkshire were made by the Conqueror to Alan, Duke of Brittany, and were by him sub-infeudated to numerous

[1] King Henri,
Jesus his soule do merci.
Hule and Nightingale, v. 1090.

Thomas Wright supposes that Henry II. is referred to, but I think that the obvious allusions to the works of Neckham and Marie of France make this hypothesis untenable.

[2] The nightingale's defence of herself for singing of love reflects much of that scholastic materialism which is embodied in the latter part of the *Romance of the Rose*. Compare for example vv. 1335-1508 with the speech of Genius, *Roman de la Rose*, v. 19,704.

Norman families who, while they spread their national tastes over the neighbourhood, imbibed the devotional spirit native to the soil. In the thirteenth century William de Wadington wrote in French, for these Norman inhabitants of Yorkshire, his *Manuel des Pechiez*.[1] The Saxons on their side acquired a taste for French art, and, as we have already seen, Ormin, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, had learned to adapt the Teutonic tongue to a foreign rhythmical movement.

As time advanced, the new forms of art became completely naturalised. In the second half of the thirteenth century, an East Anglian poet, reviving the tradition of Cædmon, paraphrased the books of Genesis and Exodus in octosyllabic verse. He shows, however, none of Cædmon's inspiration, and his version, which is a literal reproduction of the text of Scripture, is without interest, except as a landmark indicating the progress of French influence in the North and East. The language is on the whole perhaps less archaic than that of *The Hule and the Nightingale*, which conforms more closely to the established literary standard; on the other hand, the metre is less strict in observing the French rule of confining each line to an equal number of syllables; for example—

For sextene ger ioseph was old
Quane he was in-to egypte sold;
He was iacobes gunkeste sune,
Brictest of wastme, and of witter wune[2]
If he say hise brethere mis-faren,[3]
His fader he it gan un-hillen[4] and baren

Sometimes assonant rhyme is used instead of consonant, as

Thes othere brethere, sone on-on,
Token leue and wenten hom.[5]

And, generally speaking, the work is that of an imitator, who admires a style which he is only imperfectly able to reproduce.

[1] This work will be found printed side by side with Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* [illegible]

[2] [illegible]

[3] [illegible]

[4] [illegible] 161.

On the other hand, in *Cursor Mundi*, a Northumbrian poem of the early years of the fourteenth century, we find ourselves in company with an author more nearly approaching the quality of Cædmon and Layamon, who, having become acquainted with a new range of ideas, is resolved to make them subject to his own genius. Men in these latter days—so he tells his audience in a prologue—are delighted with romances about Alexander, Julius Cæsar, Greece, Troy, Brutus, Arthur, Gawain, Tristram and Iseult, and the stories of profane love to which they listen produce an evil effect. The best love is the love of the Virgin Mary, in whose honour he proposes to tell the story of the World from a religious point of view.

> Efter hali kirkes state
> This ilke boke is translate,
> Unto Engliss tung to rede
> For the luue of englijs lede,
> Englis lede of meri ingeland,
> For the comen to untherstand.
> Frenkis rimes here I rede
> Comunli in ilka stede;
> That is most made for frankis men.
> Quat helpis him that none can cen?
> Of ingeland the naciune
> Er Englijs men in comune,
> The speche that men may mast wid spede
> Mast to speke thar-wid war nede;
> Seldom was for ani chance
> Englis tong preched in France:
> Gif we thaim ilkan their language
> And than do we na utretage.[1]

Though dealing with a sacred subject, the poet has availed himself, in every direction, of the spirit of romance which had fascinated the imagination of mankind, and has composed his religious history of the world in a mood

[1] This book is translated according to the state of holy Church, to read in the English tongue, for the love of English people, English people of merry England, for the better understanding of the commons. French rhymes I commonly read here in every place, mostly made for Frenchmen. How does that help him that does not know French? English men are commonly of the English nation. It is necessary to speak that speech which may be most readily understood. English tongue was seldom for any purpose used in France: let us give to each their language, and then we do no outrage.—*Cursor Mundi* (Morris), 231.

precisely like that in which Benoît de Ste. More composed his *Roman de Troie.* He presses into his service romantic science, borrowed from the *Secretum Secretorum*, and Alexander of Neckham's *De Naturis Rerum;* romantic sacred legend, found in Peter de Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, and Jacobus de Voragine's *Aurea Legenda;* romantic religious allegory, from the model furnished by Robert Grosseteste in his *Chasteau d'Amour;* and romantic religious history, from the *Gospel of Nicodemus.* Distant events and persons are brought into familiar relations with the reader by the use of the terms and titles of chivalry: thus the poet speaks of "Sir Pilate," "Sir Caiaphas," and even of "Sir Judas." The entire story is told with a freshness and naïveté that prove the writer to be a genuine descendant of Cædmon, though breathing the atmosphere of the Middle Ages. The following extract is a rendering of the passage from the *Gospel of Nicodemus* describing the descent into hell[1]:—

While that helle and prince Saton
Made to-gedyr this mornyng mone,
There come a stevyn as thonder-blast,
A gostly voys cryng fast,
Ye princes off helle, undoth your gate,
The king of blisse woll have in-late
When helle this herd it seid anon,
Do now go hen fro me, Saton;
A faint fyghter methink art thou;
How wylt thou fight with Jesu now?
With that yaf helle yt-selfe abraide,
And cast out tho Satan, and seid
To his wyckyd workes samen,
Spere your yates, this is no gamen,
Your brasyn yates spere you welle,
And byndyth hem with barres of stele;

[1] While Hell and Prince Satan made together their mournful moan, there came a sound as a thunder-blast, a ghostly voice crying strongly, "Ye princes of hell, undo your gate the King of bliss will have entrance." When Hell heard this it said anon, "Go now hence from me, Satan, a faint fighter art thou, methinks! How wilt thou now fight with Jesus?" With that Hell [illegible]

of other men."—*Cursor Mundi* (Morris), 18,074

Enforsyth you with might and mayne
Stalworthely to stond ayen,
Ar ye with alle tho that we ne wold
Bytake in other mennys hold.

While the author of the *Cursor Mundi* was thus importing into religious history the spirit and imagery of romance, the alchemy of Norman poetry was also transmuting the metrical homily, an ancient and favourite form of Saxon art, and one which most readily accommodated itself to the understanding of the people. It is true that Richard Rolle of Hampole, a pious hermit of Yorkshire, in his *Pricke of Conscience*, and William de Shoreham, a Kentish vicar, in his *Seven Sacraments*, preserved in their compositions that strictly hortatory form of instruction which prevails in the more ancient homilies.[1] But in the *Cycle of Homilies* the method of the *Ormulum*—which confined itself to paraphrasing the Gospel for the day with the usual addition of an allegorical interpretation—is modified to suit the taste of the times by the insertion of anecdotes, taken from Lives of the Saints and from other quarters, which illustrate the remarks of the preacher.[2] These tales were at first almost exclusively religious in their aim as in their origin, but the attractions of the *fabliau* having been once recognised, the practice rapidly extended itself, till in the *Handlyng Synne* of Robert of Brunne we find that the spirit of the trouvère is scarcely less strong than that of the homilist.

Robert Mannyng, a canon of the Gilbertine order and a monk in the Priory of Sempringham, was born some time in the latter half of the thirteenth century, and died about A.D. 1340. He has himself informed us of the date of the composition of his *Handlyng Synne*.[3] He has also recorded the motive of his work:—

[1] For the former, see Mr. Morris's edition (1863); for the latter, *Early English Poetry* (Percy Society, vol. 28).

[2] See the account given of this work in Ten Brink's *Early English Literature* (H. M. Kennedy's translation), p. 290. I have not myself seen it.

[3] Dane Felyp was mayster that tyme
That y began thys Englyssh ryme;
The yeres of grace fyl than to be
A thousynd and thre hundrede and thre.
Handlyng Synne, Prologue, 73.

That may be weyl on Englysshe tolde,
To telle yow that y may be bolde,
For lewde men y undyrtoke
On Englysshe tunge to make thys boke.
For many ben of swych manere
That talys and rymys will blethly here;
Yn gamys and festys and at the ale
Love men to listen troteuale,[1]
That may falle ofte to vylanye,
To dedly synne or other folye;
For swyche men have I made thes ryme,
That they may wel dyspende here tyme;
And there yn somewhat for to here,
To leve al swyche foul manere,
And for to kunne knowe therynne,
That they wene no synne be ynne[2]

The original text on which Mannyng based his "Englyssh" composition was the *Manuel des Pechiez* of William of Wadington, who had himself obtained much of his matter from the Latin *Liber Floreti* (attributed to Jean de Garlande, a French or Anglo-Norman versifier of the eleventh century), and who, after the fashion of the times, protested that he had strictly followed his authority.[3] He might with more justice, had it suited him, have claimed the credit of invention, for the tales with which he enlivens his *Manuel* are an addition of his own. Mannyng treats Wadington's text with equal freedom, preserving his author's doctrinal framework—a homily on the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, and the Seven Sacraments—but altering, omitting, or replacing, the illustrative stories, as it suits his purpose. His own tales are very quaint and entertaining, and it may readily be imagined that, when the dryness of the discourse caused the audience to become drowsy, their flagging attention would have been aroused by

[1] Idle tale. It looks as if the word should be "trovetale," *i.e.* trouvère's tale. The *v* and *t* have been transposed.

[2] And to know those kind of tales that they see to have no sin in them.

[3] Rien del mien ni mettrai
Fors sicum jeo apris le ay,
Nule faucine ni trovorez
Plus voluntiers le lisez.
William de Wadington,
Prologe del *Manuel des Pechiez*, 59.

an anecdote on a level with their barbarous simplicity.[1] He shows considerable skill in weaving his stories into his sermon. For example, when treating of the Deadly Sin of Pride, he observes that one kind of pride, frequently found in women, is love of dress; and to illustrate this, he tells a story of two monks who once met two women with long trains, on each of which (invisible to the wearers) was perched a devil, who, when the women's "tails" were turned towards the monks, tumbled into the dirt.[2] Sloth is a sin which shows itself by excessive devotion to various kinds of popular amusement. Tournaments in particular are to be avoided: they give occasion for all the deadly sins.[3] Minstrelsy is not to be indulged in without self-restraint. Once upon a time a minstrel presented himself before a bishop and greatly disturbed him whilst devoutly engaged in saying grace. The prelate, who apparently foresaw the consequences of this deadly sin, put no check upon the untimely mirth of the musician, but, when the latter turned to go out of the house, a stone fell on his head and crushed him.[4] This story, says the pious Robert, I tell for the good of gleemen. As to the sin of sacrilege, this is frequently committed by those who dance in church-yards during divine service. Let such people take warning by what happened to twelve foolish revellers, who committed this sin while the priest was performing mass. Being requested by the latter to refrain, they were so far from complying that they induced his daughter to join them in the dance, whereupon the good man wished that they might go on dancing for a twelvemonth, or as the Latin, from which Robert took his story, says, for ever. This fate actually overtook all the party, including the daughter, and the punishment was so exemplary, that the emperor Henry crossed the sea to witness the remarkable sight.[5] In the *Handlyng Synne*, in short, the reader may still breathe the same atmosphere that inspired the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great; but he will also detect the presence of an element

[1] See, for example, "The Tale of the Witch and her Bag that Sucked Cows," *Handlyng Synne* (Furnivall), p. 16.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 110.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 145.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 148.

[5] *Ibid.* p. 280.

that prepares him for the transition to the style of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*; from which point he may travel by easy stages to the plots of the Elizabethan dramatists.

Robert of Brunne was the author of another work which, in a different way, forms an equally distinct landmark in English poetry. The first of the English poetical fabulists, he may be regarded as the last of the English poetical historians; and his *Chronicle* deserves honourable mention as an example of a class of literature that exercised a powerful influence in fusing the conflicting elements, out of which arose the unity of the English nation. Here too we find our starting point in the Latin language and the Latin Church. The great historical movement in this country begins with the *Ecclesiastical History* of Bede, which connects the history of England with the Chronicle of the World by the episode of the Saxon Conquest. In later times the Celtic patriotism of the pseudo-Nennius altered the lines of true history, by blending with Bede's matter of fact the fabulous version of the History of Britain. This again, as we have already seen, furnished Geoffrey of Monmouth with the germs of his Latin romance, which the Norman Wace, proud of the great traditions of the land conquered by his countrymen, reduced to prosaic French verse, thereby inspiring the more imaginative Layamon with a new theme for Saxon minstrelsy. Thus, in the neutral history of "Britain," the two great races occupying the English soil began, through their poets and chroniclers, to be drawn towards each other by a common sentiment of patriotism To the idea of British nationality, constantly coloured with added details by the local patriotism of monkish historians, — Florence of Worcester, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, and Simon of Durham,—fresh life was given, during the reigns of John and Henry III., both by the loss of Normandy, and by the alliance between the Norman barons and the Saxon commons, in the cause of constitutional liberty.

The first effects of these various influences on English poetry—if poetry it can be called—are seen in the *Chronicle* usually assigned to Robert of Gloucester.

Of the author of this work nothing is certainly known, beyond the fact that his name was Robert, and that he was alive at the time of the battle of Evesham, since he records as an eyewitness the great darkness which, when that battle was being fought, overspread the country for thirty miles around.[1] A kind of mythology afterwards grew up round the name of a writer so venerable. Browne in his *Britannia's Pastorals* refers to "aged Robert" as one of the early sources of English poetry;[2] and, Anthony à Wood having discovered a Robert of Gloucester who was a student of Oxford in the reign of Henry III., Thomas Hearne pleased his fancy by identifying this person with the Chronicler, and by imagining the particular house at which he must have lodged during his course at the university.[3] As the dialect of the *Chronicle*, and the allusion in it mentioned above, prove it to have been written by some native of the Gloucestershire district, it would be mere pedantry to quarrel with Hearne's pleasing fable.

Robert opens his work with a description of England, vividly illustrating what has been said of the growth of patriotic feeling in the country, and which may also be taken as a good sample of his style:—

Engelond his a wel god lond · ich wene ech londe best ·
Iset in the on end of the · worlde as al in the west ·
The se geth him al aboute · he stond as in an yle ·
Of fon hii they dorre the lasse doute—bot hit be thorȝ gyle ·
Of folc of the sulve lond · as me hath iseye ȝwile ·
From southe to north he is long · eiȝte hondred mile ·
And tuo hondred mile brod · from est to west to wende ·
Amid the lond as hit be · and noȝt as bi the on ende ·
Plente me may in Engelond · of alle gode ise ·
Bote volc hit vorgulte · other ȝeres the worse be ·
Vor Engelond is vol inoȝ · of frut and ek of tren ·
Of wodes and of parkes · that joye hit is to sen ·
Of foweles and of bestes · of wilde and tame also ·
Of salt fichȝ and eke verss · of vaire riuers there to ·
Of wellen suete and cold inouȝ · of lesen and of mede ·
Of seluer or and of gold · of tyn and eke of lede ·

[1] *Chronicle*, vv. 11,746-49. See the careful preface to Mr. Aldis Wright's edition, p. xi.

[2] A shepherd that began sing o'er
The lay which aged Robert sung of yore.—Bk. ii. song 4.

[3] Hearne's preface to Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, p. lxxvi.

Of stel of yre and of bras · of god corn gret won ·
Of wit and of wolle god · betere ne may be non ·
Wateres he hath ek inouȝ · ac at uore alle othere thre ·
Out of the lond into the se · armes as thei it be ·
ȝware bi the ssipes mowe come · fram the se and wende.
And bring alonde good inoȝ · aboute in eche ende.[1]

Like his Latin predecessors Robert loves local and antiquarian details, and dwells with interest on the features of the different parts of the country he describes. He is faithful to historic precedent also in recording the "Mirabilia" of the country, which, according to his version, are the warm waters of Bath, Stonehenge, and the underground blasts coming up through the Peak Cavern. When he has recited these, together with the names of the four great Roman roads, he returns to the praises of England and its inhabitants :—

So clene lond is Engelond · and so cler withouten hore,
The veireste men in the world · ther inne beth ibore,
So clene and vair and pur ȝwit · among other men hii beth,
That me knoweth hem in eche lond · bi seȝte thar me hem seth ·
So clene is al so that lond · and mannes blood so pur ·
That the gret evel ne cometh naȝt ther · that me clupeth that holi fur ·
That vorfreteth menne limes · riȝt as it were ibrende
Ac men of ffrance in thulke vuel · sone ne sueth amende
ȝif hii beth ibroȝt in to Engelond · ȝware thorȝ me may iwite
That Engelond is londe best as it is iwrite.[2]

[1] England is a very good land; I judge the best of all lands, set in the one end of the world, in the extreme west. The sea goes all round it; it stands as in an island · they need have no fears of foes save through the treachery of the folk of the same land, as has formerly been seen. From south to north it is eight hundred miles long, and two hundred miles broad, to go from east to west, that is taking the land in the middle and not at the one end. Plenty of all goods may be seen in England except the people forfeit of steel, of iron, and of brass; of good corn great abundance, of wheat, and of good wool none can be better It has also enough of waters, and three above all others, like arms running out of the land into the sea, whereby the ships may come from the sea and return to it, and bring ashore goods enough bought at each end —Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, 1-22.

[2] So clean a land is England and so clear without dirt, the fairest men in the world are born therein; so clean, and fair, and pure white are they among other men that they may be known in each land wherever they are seen. So clean is also that land and man's blood so pure, that the great evil may not come there that is called holy fire, that wastes men's limbs as if

After specifying the Seven Ages of the World, Robert begins his narrative, following for the most part the *History* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, but frequently referring to Henry of Huntingdon, and William of Malmesbury, and possibly borrowing details from Wace and Layamon.[1] He is, however, by no means a mere transcriber. Besides the industry he shows in consulting the best authorities, he takes a real interest in his subject on its moral side, and his reflections have often great significance, as showing the feelings of the native English towards the Norman conquerors. Here, for example, is his judgment on the downfall of the Saxon dynasty:—

"Thus the English folk came to the ground for nought, for a false king having no right to the kingdom, and came to a new lord, whose right was greater: but neither of them, as may be seen, was entirely in the right; and thus was that land, I wis, brought into Norman's hand; so that it is a great chance if there is ever a recovery of it. The high men that be in England are of the Normans, and the low men of the Saxons, as I understand, so that ye see on either side what right ye have to it. But I understand that it was done by God's will. For while the men of this land were pure heathens, no land and no people were in arms against them. But afterwards the people received Christianity, and kept but for a little while the commandments they had received, and turned to sloth and to pride, and to lechery, and to gluttony, and high men much to robbery; and it was as the spirits said in a vision to St. Edward, how there should come such misery into England on account of the robbery of high men and the fornication of clerks, and how God should send sorrow into this kingdom between Michaelmas and St. Luke on St. Calixtus day."[2]

It is evident that the chronicler intends his con-

they were burned. But men of France in that evil soon obtain a remedy if they be brought into England; whereby may be known that England is the best of lands as hath b [illegible].—Robert of C[illegible]'s *Chronicle*, 180-88.

[1] Mr. Wright [illegible] Robert [illegible] to Wace and Layamon.—Preface [illegible] v., xv. [illegible]

[2] Robert [illegible]

temporaries to learn a lesson from the judgment of God on the Saxon nation. He sees, too, the punishing hand of Heaven in the fate that befell the descendants of the Conqueror.

"Game of hounds and of wild beasts he loved well, and his forest and his woods, and the New Forest most of all, which is in Southamptonshire, for this he loved well, and stored full of beasts and pastures with great wrong, for he cast out of house and home a great multitude of men, and took their land for thirty miles and more thereabout, and made it forest and pastures for the beasts to feed on; he took little heed of the poor men he disinherited. Therefore therein befell much mischief, and his son was shot in it, William the red King; and also his only son named Richard met his death there; and Richard his only nephew broke his neck there as he rode a-hunting, and his horse chanced to kick. To such misadventure turned the wrong done to poor men."[1]

Robert of Brunne finished his *Chronicle* in 1338. He was a less original historian than Robert of Gloucester, and was content for the most part to translate with some closeness from Wace's *Brut*, and from the *Chronicle* of Peter de Langtoft, which is written in French. His motive, however, in making the translation was poetical, or at any rate popular—

Als thai haf wryten and sayd
Haf I alle in myn Inglis layd,
In symple speche as I couthe,
That is lightest in mennes mouthe.
I made noght for no disours,
Ne for no seggours, no harpours,
Bot for the luf of symple men
That strange Inglis can not ken,
For many it ere that strange Inglis
In ryme wate never what it is,
And bot thai wist what it mente
Ellis me thoght it were alle schente[2]

---

[1] Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, 7698 7711.

[2] And unless they knew what it meant I thought my labour would be all wasted.—Prologue to Mannyng's *Chronicle*.

Robert of Gloucester is an antiquarian and a moralist first, a poet only by accident; but Mannyng's main interest is in the story, and the more fabulous this is—provided alway it has the semblance of authority—the better he is pleased. He accepts as history, for example, the legend of Guy of Warwick, and is much more willing than Wace to believe all the marvels that Geoffrey of Monmouth relates of Arthur. Thus, Wace having expressed himself with a little scepticism in a line or two on this subject, Robert breaks out:—

Al ys nought soth ne nought al lye,
Ne al wysdam ne al folye.
Ther nys no thyng of hym seyd
That hit ne may be to godnesse leyd.
More[1] than othere were his dedes
That men of hym so mykil redes.
Ne were his dedes hadde be writen[2]
Of hym no thyng men scholde have wyten.[3]
Geffrey Arthur of Monemu
He wrot his dedes that were of pru,[4]
And blamed both Gildas and Bede,
Why they wolde nought of hym rede,
Sin he bar the pris of alle Cristen kynges,
And write so lytel of his preysinges,
And more worschip of him spoke ther was
That of any of tho that spekes Gildas,
Or of any that Bede wrot,
Save holy men that we wot.
In alle landes wrot men of Arthur,
Hys noble dedes of honur;
In ffrance men wrot and yit men wryte
But herd have we of hym but lyte.
Therefore of hym more men fynd
In farre bookes, als ys kynd,[5]
Than we have in thys lond
That we have, ther men hit fond.[6]
Till Domesday men schalle spelle,
And of Arthures dedes talke and telle.[7]

Taken in connection with the prologue to the *Cursor Mundi* this passage is exceedingly significant, for it shows that the genius of the romances, which had fired

[1] Greater. [2] And if it were not that his deeds had been written.
[3] Known. [4] Valour. [5] As is natural.
[6] Than we have in this land of ours where men invented it.
[7] *Chronicle* of Robert of Brunne, 10,587-10,614.

the imagination of the Normans, had as yet scarcely touched the Saxon mind. It was natural that it should be so. The Saxons for the most part had remained outside the system of chivalry; they had taken little part in the Crusades, and were consequently strangers to the passion for knight-errantry which these engendered. The few English metrical romances of this period—such as *Sir Tristram* and the later *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick*—though the subjects are English, are invariably translated from the French. Two legends of an earlier date, *The Song of Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*, are possible (though I think very doubtful) exceptions; but Mannyng's observations on the latter poem show how little the English writers of the time appreciated either the spirit of romance or the facts of history. For a time he believed it to be history, but when he found that the elder chroniclers had made no mention of it, he treated the tale as a fable. Though he supposed Gunter, the father of Havelok, to be a contemporary of Alfred, he looked for a mention of Havelok's story in Gildas and Bede![1]

The first part of Mannyng's *Chronicle*, in which he closely follows Wace, is written in octosyllabic verse; in the second, where Langtoft is his original, he employs Alexandrines often rhyming in the middle, as well as at the end, of the verse. It is interesting to compare the following passage, which may serve as a sample of his second manner, with Robert of Gloucester's reflections already cited on the same subject:—

> Allas! for Sir Harald, for him was mykelle reuth,
> Full well his awen suld hald, if he had kept his treuth.
> Bot that he was forsuorn, mishappyng therefor he fond;
> Suld he never els haf lorn for William no lond,
> Ne bien in that bondage, that brouht was over the se;
> Now ere thei in seruage fulle fele that or was fre.
> Our fredom that day for ever toke the leve,
> For Harald it went away, his falshood did us greve[2]

[1] Hearne's edition of Langtoft's *Chronicle*, vol i p. 25

[2] Alas! for Sir Harold, great was the pity for him, full well he might have held his own, if he had kept his word. But since he was forsworn he found therefore misfortune; else had he never lost any land through William, nor been in that bondage that was brought over the sea; now

It will readily be perceived that when Mannyng, departing from his expressed intention of turning his French into "simple Inglis," imitates the *rime entrelacé*, his style becomes necessarily less flowing, and—in consequence of the greater tendency to inversion—more obscure. On the other hand, when compared with Robert of Gloucester, his diction and versification appear wonderfully clear and harmonious. The former, a contemporary of Mannyng, though older, wrote in the south-western dialect, which still retained a respect for the literary standards established in the language by Alfred. Unaffected by the infusion of new elements of race and speech, which in the north and east were causing such havoc in Anglo-Saxon grammar, the descendants of the men of Wessex continued to employ an archaic vocabulary and forms of inflection and pronunciation which were elsewhere falling into disuse. Nor were they quick in adapting themselves to foreign models. Robert of Gloucester indeed evidently intends to imitate French Alexandrines. But he must have had a bad ear, for in the second line of his *Chronicle* he throws the accent before the cæsura on the word "the," and the movement of his verse is, as a rule, painfully lame. He scarcely ever uses French words, whereas both Robert of Brunne and the author of the *Cursor Mundi*, as may be seen from the foregoing extracts, introduce them frequently, especially for the purposes of rhyme.

Nevertheless though the northern poets had done so much to modernise their language, and to naturalise foreign metrical forms, their rhythms were as yet far from attaining the smoothness of the French iambic movement. In framing their "simple speech" to suit either the measure of four accents or the Alexandrine verse, they were contented to produce a rhyming couplet, each line of which had the proper number of accents, without regard to the number of syllables. The triple

are they in serfage full many who were once free. Our freedom that day for ever took its leave; it went away on Harold's account; his falsehood did us injury.

movement is frequent in their octosyllabic verse, and on the other hand many of their lines have only seven syllables. This characteristic is mainly due to the suppression of the final *e* in the northern dialect, which caused the number of monosyllabic words in the language constantly to multiply. In this respect the southern dialect bore a closer analogy than the northern to the French language, and we may observe that the verse of four accents, in the hands of an artist like the author of *The Hule and the Nightingale*, approaches on the whole—in spite of an obsolete vocabulary and difficult syntax—nearer to the style of Chaucer, than when it is used by Robert of Brunne.

As a whole the movement described in this chapter may be summed up as follows: Natural decline, attendant upon a settled state of society, had operated, together with the spirit of Christianity, to depress the art of oral minstrelsy, which was the offspring of the primitive manners of the Anglo-Saxons, and which had been embodied in their language while it preserved its inflected form. No harvest of original genius followed the system of literary culture introduced by Alfred. But the Norman Conquest brought the people into acquaintance with Continental thought and art, and inspired imitation, both among those who were ambitious to use the Anglo-Saxon for the purposes of literature, and those who retained something of the spirit of the Teutonic minstrel. At the same time the steady disappearance, in the common speech, of grammatical inflections, owing to the intercourse between so many different races, had prepared the language for the reception of new rhythmical movements, and had made it easy for the native poets to adapt it to the literary models presented to them by the Norman immigrants.

CHAPTER V

THE EARLY RENAISSANCE: ITS EFFECTS ON LITERATURE IN ITALY, FRANCE, AND ENGLAND

THE Normans, by naturalising French literature in England, made the newly formed English language an instrument for expressing the thought of a widely extended society. Up to the middle of the thirteenth century European poetry may be said to possess a universal character. Whether composed in Latin or in any of the infant vernacular tongues, the thoughts embodied in it—scientific, devotional, sentimental, or romantic—are completely free from all traces of local or national colouring. When an Englishman or a Frenchman writes a Bestiary, he is, in each case, sure to describe in it the attributes of the panther, and to inform his readers that the animal's sweet breath makes him a type of the Saviour. A poetical moralist, whatever be his tongue, wishing to dwell on the vanity of earthly things, will certainly draw some of his ideas from Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ;* and the poetical homilist will be under like obligations to Gregory the Great. Love poetry composed by the troubadours of Provence is intelligible to the knights of the German castles; and the tales of Lancelot and Guenevere, or Tristram and Iseult, written perhaps beyond the English Channel, are read on the shores of Rimini.[1]

European poetry presents this universal character

[1] See the story of Francesca da Rimini in Dante's *Inferno*, canto v. 127 :—

> Noi leggevamo un giorno per diletto
> Di Lancilotto, come amor lo strinse.

because it reflects the image of a society which still preserves many of the essential features of the universal Roman Empire. Little indeed remained of that great original structure, except in history and poetry, and it may safely be asserted that, in the thirteenth century, no man in Europe understood the principle of the imperial rule of Constantine, in which the Emperor was at once the head, if not of the Church, at least of the established religion of the State; the guardian of the great fabric of order founded on the base of Roman citizenship; the promoter of the encyclopædic system of education inherited from the Greeks. The memory of this vast scheme had been eclipsed by one scarcely less catholic and extensive, but in which the powers of Church and State were no longer united but co-ordinate. In the revived Empire of Charlemagne, though the Emperor was indeed the heir of the Cæsars, and the guardian of what remained of Hellenic civilisation, he had received the imperial crown in trust, not from the Roman Senate and the Roman people, but from the Bishop of Rome, now universally recognised as the head of the Western Church. And not only was Charlemagne head of the Roman Empire, he was also chief of the whole system of Teutonic feudalism, with all its complex hierarchy of duchies, marquisates, and counties, swarming with barbarous ideas and customs, which had flowed around, and almost submerged, the old structure of European civilisation.

Theoretically the constitution of the Empire of Charlemagne is still recognised in the Europe of the fourteenth century, and the order of society groups itself round the allied but rival powers of the Papacy and the Empire. The Pope is now the representative of the unity of Western Christendom. His seat in the imperial city is the centre to which all spiritual causes are referred. As the guardian of the whole system of ecclesiastical education, he can mould the minds of men in every European country. By means of interdict and excommunication, he can make the force of his decrees felt even in the secular affairs of each European kingdom. His

authority is fortified by the logic of the schools, and enforced against schismatic and heretic by the roving armies of the preaching orders.

Theoretically again, in the secular sphere, the authority of the Emperor is as comprehensive as the Pope's in spiritual matters. In his capacity of Emperor of Rome, his power extends over every land embraced within the dominions of the great historic Empire; in his capacity of feudal chief of the barbarian conquerors, he is the military head and suzerain of all the kings who derive from Charlemagne authority to represent him in the various parts of his dominions, as his counts and lieutenants.

Such was the theory of European order at the time from which this history of English poetry takes its departure. In its outward application it was still clothed with a certain show of pomp and pageantry. And the best way of measuring how far the time-honoured instrument of government, and the corresponding moulds of catholic thought, were adapted to the actual wants of mankind, is to watch the imperial system at work. The student, who wishes to form in his mind an image of feudal Europe in the fourteenth century, may observe all the vital forces of the time brought picturesquely before him at the Diet of Coblenz, held, in 1338, on the very eve of the Hundred Years' War between France and England.

"Two thrones," says a French historian, describing the scene, "were erected in the market-place, before the church of Saint Castor; on the more elevated sat the Emperor, on the other King Edward; around them 17,000 men-at-arms—Germans, Brabançons, Hollanders, Walloons, and English—crowded the market-place, the streets of the town, and the banks of the river. The Emperor held in his right hand the sceptre, in his left the globe, emblem of the empire of the world, and a German knight raised a naked sword above his head. A clerk read the constitution by which the Diet of Frankfort had vindicated the independence of the imperial crown against the pretensions of the Pope; then Edward rose and prayed the Emperor and the princes

of the Empire to aid him to have justice against Philip of Valois, who was unjustly detaining from him both the ancient possessions of the Plantagenets and the crown of France itself. Louis received the request of Edward as a suzerain from whom justice is demanded, and further accused Philip of felony on his own account, inasmuch as Philip had refused him homage for the fiefs which he held of the Empire. . . . The Emperor, on the advice of the great vassals, declared Philip to be deprived of all right to the protection of the Empire, and conferred on King Edward the title of Imperial Vicar for seven years in all the provinces on the left bank of the Rhine, investing him also with military command, and all the rights of sovereignty, including even that of coining money."[1]

Here, under cover of a splendid pageant, we see advanced pretensions of the most venerable antiquity; a protest against the claim of the Pope to bestow the possession of the Roman Empire; the claim of the Emperor to be the over-lord of all the kings of the world; the recognition of the Feudal System as part of the law of Europe. And yet life had ebbed so swiftly from each of these great forces in Church and State, that the clerks, if they were shrewd men, must have smiled as they proclaimed the sounding principles. Had the Diet indeed been held a century earlier, there might have been some meaning in a protest against the claims of the Papacy to paramount authority. Then the triumph of Hildebrand over the Emperor Henry IV. would have still lingered in men's memories, and they would have recalled how recently Innocent III. had released the subjects of John in England from their allegiance, and in France had humbled the pride of Philip Augustus. But the Popes, in the pursuit of their temporal interests, had long ago impaired the operation of their spiritual power; by aiming at supremacy in Italy they had lost their world-wide dominion; at the time of the Diet of Coblenz the Pope was a dependant of the

[1] Translated from H. Martin's *Histoire de France*, vol. v. p 41 (edition of 1855).

French king at Avignon; heresy had sprung up in the heart of one of the great orders on which his authority so largely rested; the spiritual influence of the Holy See had been weakened by the most flagrant venality. The power of the Emperor was even more infirm, for while his title to be the successor of the Cæsars was recognised to rest upon a figment, he lacked the strength to support his acknowledged rights as the elected chief of the Feudal System. The vassal whom he had declared to be "deprived of the protection of the Empire" had contemptuously ignored his authority; the vassal who had appealed to his supreme tribunal had indignantly declined to render him the external marks of homage.

The Feudal System itself under a superficial splendour veiled an extreme decrepitude. It still appealed with a strong religious sanction to some of the noblest instincts in human nature, the mutual obligations between superior and inferior, and the duties of the strong to the weak. By the honour also which it paid to the virtue of courtesy, and by its respect for women, it had done much to establish a noble and gentle code of manners, which was reflected in the literature of the period. But, being the natural offspring of tribal institutions, it was ill adapted to promote the ends of civil society. Even if it could have been held together by a succession of strong rulers like Charlemagne, the rights of inheritance, which must have grown up in spite of the central government, with the spirit of lawlessness encouraged by local independence and private war, would have effectually checked the growth of any system of legal order. The fervour of religious zeal united for a time the warring atoms of feudalism in a succession of Crusades. But as these were wanting altogether in definite purpose, and amounted to little more than an exodus of tribal leaders from west to east, their sole lasting effect was to increase the anarchy, and weaken the power, of the system in the various countries of Europe.

If the Diet of Coblenz presents a brilliant image of the external splendour of feudalism, which was indeed

never more striking than at this period, it is not less eloquent in the silence with which it passes over the forces that were actually at work in the heart of society. The ideas of local patriotism and of civil liberty find no place in the deliberations of its members. Though it was the preface to a war which lasted for nearly a hundred years, and affected the fortunes and interests of two great nations, it regarded the quarrel between the kings of England and France precisely as if it were a dispute between rival landlords about their respective rights over a manor. The picturesque assemblage of so many nationalities—"Germans, Brabançons, Hollanders, Walloons, and English"—seems to resemble the levies from so many roving tribes, rather than from peoples, of whom some had established the Hanseatic League, others had successfully asserted their municipal liberties against their feudal lords, and others again had furnished their king with supplies for the conduct of the war by the vote of their elected representatives. Of the bankers of Florence who trusted too blindly to the credit of Edward, of the woollen manufacturers of Flanders whose interests had been injured by the encroachments of Philip, no notice is taken. Yet it was from this class of men, always silently growing in wealth and power, that a new order of things was being formed amidst the all-embracing envelope of Catholicism and Feudalism, which, already weakened by the schism in the Papacy, was in the course of the next century and a half to be completely shattered; in France by the fields of Crecy, Poitiers, and Agincourt; in England by the Civil Wars of the Roses.

But while the great and growing movement of civil life was thus ignored in the pageantry of the period, it was rapidly finding outward expression in art and literature. Art, indeed, in spite of the decay of its ancient principles, had never ceased to employ its resources in facilitating the transition of thought from Paganism to Christianity. Architecture had shown the way by adapting the forms of the basilica to the uses of the Church. St. Ambrose and St. Gregory had proved how fine an

instrument was the Latin language for the purposes of church music. The painter had sought to express the elementary truths of religion, at first by means of signs and symbols, afterwards through such stiff imitations of nature as could be produced by the conventionalism of Byzantine art; and from these rude beginnings Giotto, inspired by the life of the Italian cities, had learned to cover the walls of the churches with representations of Scripture history full of movement and meaning. By a somewhat different road, the gleeman or jongleur, in his endeavour to fit the composite vernacular tongues of Europe to the requirements of minstrelsy and music, had provided men with a vocabulary and syntax adequate for the expression of philosophic thought in prose or verse.

After the invention of this metrical instrument, variety was soon introduced into the conventional catholicity of literary composition. Towards the close of the thirteenth century, literature in every European country, or at least in the three in which thought was most active—Italy, France, and England—began to exhibit three leading characteristics: (1) A general recognition of the authoritative theory of life in Church and State; (2) An equally widespread sense that this theory was not working in harmony with the actual requirements of human society; (3) An attempt to give expression in the vernacular speech to the thoughts awakened by the sense of discord. From the joint operation of these conflicting impulses arose the complex movement generally known as the Renaissance.

"The Renaissance" is a phrase at once misleading and obscure. It seems in itself to mean "new birth." But by some writers it is employed to signify a new-born spirit of revolt against the trammels of ecclesiastical authority and tradition, while others use it in a more restricted sense, as indicating a freshly awakened interest in the principles of classical literature, which had been allowed to slumber through the darkness of the Middle Ages. Neither of these definitions, however, can be said to cover all the facts of the case. For on the one hand

the pioneers of the movement were the Schoolmen, who were also the most powerful defenders of the authority of the Church; and on the other, the stream of classical culture, however feeble and shrunken in volume, had never entirely ceased to flow. The Renaissance was in fact a tendency inherent in the condition of things, and it was promoted from different quarters by the independent action of all the greatest minds of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Amid the ever-increasing anarchy of their times men were forced to reflect on the first principles of order, and naturally turned for counsel to the works of the philosophers who had studied similar problems in the free states of antiquity. Hence, in the philosophy of the Schoolmen, and particularly of St. Thomas Aquinas, we find a revival of that political education which, as has been already shown, was overlaid, in the decline of the Roman Empire, by the encyclopædic education of Alexandria. A profound study of the *Ethics* and *Politics* of Aristotle awoke new and general interest in political science; a little later the *History* of Livy, and the Letters, Speeches, and Philosophical Dialogues of Cicero, enabled the mind to view objects in the past in better perspective and proportion; so that, though the historic sense was still in its infancy, men were becoming dimly aware of their relationship to the citizens of Greece and Rome. By some the ideas derived from their new studies were thrown into the logical form natural to them from their scholastic training; others expressed their emotions in lyrical verse; and others again, of a more lively or less reflective turn, imitated directly the objects immediately before their eyes. But they all wrote in their native tongues, and accordingly, while the Renaissance allied itself everywhere with the cause of political liberty, it at the same time developed the separate life of every European nation, by perfecting the structure of each national language.

There was indeed as yet nothing like a national literature in any European country. All writers shared in the

ideas and sentiments derived from the universal social framework. What was produced by a great poet in one vernacular tongue was read in every other part of the European Commonwealth, and suggested some imaginative design or metrical experiment to those who were elsewhere struggling, under different circumstances, to subdue to their thought the difficulties of an infant language. The imagination of the feudal world was still fairly homogeneous; Dante and Petrarch easily learned the lessons taught them by their Provençal neighbours; and if we are to understand the work of Chaucer and Langland, we must first observe how the problems of the age were being dealt with by the poets of France and Italy. For the poetry of Chaucer is largely inspired by the works of Dante, of Petrarch, and, above all, of Boccaccio; and though Langland probably knew no modern language but his own, the analogy between the character of his thought and of Dante's is so strong, as to show how general were the forces that unconsciously acted upon the imagination of individual poets, of whatever race and tongue. At this point, therefore, it becomes necessary to examine the effect of the Renaissance on the literatures of the different nations of Europe.

To begin with Italy, which of all the countries of Europe exhibited in the most striking contrast the ruins of former greatness and the wretchedness of existing anarchy. The whole framework of her ancient social order, at least in the country districts, had been swept away by the deluge of Lombard barbarism; and the institutions which had taken root there had developed, as in other parts of Europe, into the fabric of feudalism. Once the seat and centre of universal empire, she was now more completely deprived than any other nation of a central system of government; and all the antagonistic principles, inherent in the Feudal System and in the mediæval scheme of Church and State, had for centuries struggled in her bosom. The conflicting rights of Pope and Emperor; the claims of the latter to absolute authority over her free cities; the quarrel of Guelph and

Ghibelline in the cities themselves; when this ceased, the legacy of faction dividing the aristocratic and democratic parties; the perpetual rivalries of petty and jealous states;—all these evils had embroiled the life of Italy in a wild and hopeless confusion. Civil war necessarily prepared the way for the foreign conqueror, and, since the days of Charles Martel, the soil of Italy had never long been free from the presence of some alien over-lord, called in by one of the rival powers that sought to rule her, to act as her deliverer from another.

In spite of the anarchy by which she was distracted, Italy preserved far more vividly than any other European country the memory of Roman citizenship. Every Italian was proud of Rome, as the centre of the Catholic religion; he was also proud of her, as the centre of Empire, the city in which the Emperor, German barbarian though he might be, received the symbol of his universal authority. At a comparatively early date, the historic cities in the North of Italy had rebuilt their walls which the Lombards had destroyed; and as each community increased in wealth and prosperity, the aspect of the country began to recall once more the picture enshrined in one of the most beautiful lines of Virgil.[1] The growing sense of the value of civic liberty had even inspired many of the cities to unite in common federal action, and by the Lombard League they had maintained their independence against the power of Frederic Barbarossa. The period between the Peace of Constance and the death of Frederic II. is the heroic age in the life of the mediæval Italian cities, strongly resembling the epoch in Greece between the battle of Marathon and the Peloponnesian War. All the energies of the individual were bent on making the life of his city as glorious and beautiful as it was free; and out of this soil of civic liberty sprang the race of great artists who continued to instruct Europe in the principles of beauty long after the political freedom of Italy had perished. Yet the Florentine, the Milanese, and the Pisan of the golden age did not

[1] Virg. *Georg.* ii. 157: "Fluminaque antiquos subterlabentia muros": "The rivers gliding beneath ancient walls."

forget that they were members of a more extended society. If their pride in the external splendour of their native city exceeded that of the provincials celebrated in the *Urbium Nobilium Ordo* of Ausonius, they also valued themselves, like Rutilius, on being citizens of the Roman Empire, and cherished, as if it were part of their own traditions, the memory of the all-conquering Republic.

The renascent idea of Roman citizenship lies at the root of the conception of life formed by the greatest of Italian poets. Dante's study of Aristotle had taught him that man was formed to live in society. "Would it not be the worse for man on earth," he asks, "if he were not a citizen?"[1] He had served his own city too faithfully for happiness, and some of his most beautiful verses set forth the image of the "sober and chaste" Florence before she had suffered the corruption of luxury.[2] After his banishment he carried the same spirit into a larger retrospect, and, almost in the very language of Virgil, describes the simple and manly customs out of which the Roman Republic grew to be "the most glorious of created things": "Thou knowest what it (the Roman ensign) did, borne by the illustrious Romans against Brennus, against Pyrrhus, and against other princes and commonwealths: whence Torquatus and Quinctius, called from his unkempt locks, and the Decii and the Fabii had the fame which I gladly embalm."[3] From the magnanimity, wisdom, and justice of the Roman Republic Dante deduces the right

[1] Or di', sarebbe il peggio
Per l' uomo in terra, se non fosse cive?
Paradiso, canto viii. 116.

Compare Aristotle, *Ethics*, i. 7, *φύσει πολιτικὸς ἄνθρωπος*. *Ibid.* ix. 9, *πολιτικὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ συζῆν πεφυκός*.

[2] Fiorenza dentro dalla cerchia antica,
Ond' ella toglie ancora e terza e nona,
Si stava in pace sobria e pudica.
. . . . .
Bellincion Berti vid' io andar cinto
Di cuoio e d' osso, e venir dallo specchio
La donna sua, senza il viso dipinto:
E vidi quel dei Nerli, e quel del Vecchio
Esser contenti alla pelle scoverta,
E le sue donne al fuso ed al pennecchio.
Paradiso, canto xv. 97-117.

[3] *Ibid.* vi. 43.

of universal monarchy inherent in the head of the Holy Roman Empire.

On the other hand his instinct is as strongly opposed to the institutions of feudalism and to the temporal power of the Papacy. In so far indeed as aristocracy is an essential element in the life of a well-ordered city, he shows himself strongly aristocratic, and speaks with vehemence and bitterness of the evils produced by the confusion of ranks, and the interference of the populace in affairs of state.[1] Nor does he deny that great virtues may be reproduced in the successive representatives of a few noble families, but he likens nobility to a cloak which unless it is constantly added to must necessarily be curtailed by time.[2] On the feudal principle of inheritance, which, long established among the Lombard lords of Italy, constituted in the opinion of the vulgar the essence of nobility, he looks with profound contempt, since, as he says, the foundation of riches may have been laid in force and fraud, and their continued possession may be attended with every kind of wretchedness.[3] Moreover the principle of hereditary aristocracy must be based on a belief in the descent of mankind from a multiplicity of families, which is contrary to the doctrine of Scripture.[4] True nobility *consists in bringing to perfection the virtues implanted in* the human mind by the grace of God[5] These ethical and civic conceptions of the nature of aristocracy, opposed as they were to the prejudices of the time, made a deep impression on the mind of Dante's more thoughtful contemporaries, and we shall find them hereafter reproduced by more than one English poet, and notably by Chaucer.[6]

Another cause of the universal anarchy of the times, in the judgment of Dante, is the confusion of functions

[1] Sempre la confusion delle persone
Principio fu del mal della cittade,
Come del corpo il cibo che s' appone.
Paradiso, xvi. 67.

[2] Ben sei tu manto che tosto raccorce,
Sì che, se non s' appon di die in die,
Lo tempo va dintorno con le force.
Ibid. xvi. 7.

[3] *Convito*, iv. c. 11, 12. [4] *Ibid.* iv. 15. [5] *Ibid.* iv. 20.

[6] Chaucer, "Wife of Bath's Tale," 1109

in Church and State. "Man has need," he says, "of a double direction—that is to say of the Supreme Pontiff, whose office is to bring the human race by the light of revelation to eternal life, and of the Emperor, who must direct them to a temporal end by the teaching of philosophy." These two roads are distinct, but powers which ought to be moving parallel to each other have come into collision.[1] Each in the divine order of things is a monarchy ruling in its own proper sphere, and the seat of the spiritual as of the temporal empire is the city of Rome. "Therefore," says Dante, "there should be no need of further question in order to see what a special birth and special direction, conceived and ordained by God, was that of the Holy City. And truly I am firmly of opinion that the very stones that stand in her walls are worthy of reverence; and the soil on which she rests is worthy beyond all that men can utter or feel."[2]

Thus in every direction, in the midst of ecclesiastical feudalism, the mind of Dante seems to fall back on the antique image of Roman citizenship. And yet the civic ideal he had formed was one which could never have been applied as a remedy to the actual evils which he had so accurately gauged. The *Divine Comedy* embodies, not the views of a statesman, nor even the dreams of a poet, so much as the logic of the Schoolman. It moves on parallel lines with the *Summa Theologiæ* of St. Thomas Aquinas. It is a sustained argument from the unseen to the visible world, from the divine to the human order, presenting a system of life incapable of realisation until the corrupt will of man is brought into conformity with the will of God. Dante would perhaps not have admitted so frankly as Plato that his Republic was not

[1] Soleva Roma, che il buon mondo feo,
Due Soli aver, che l' una e l' altra strada
Facean vedere, e del mondo e di Deo.
L' un l' altro ha spento; ed è giunta la spada
Col pastorale, e l' un con l' altro insieme
Per viva forza mal convien che vada;
Perocchè, giunti, l' un l' altro non teme.
Purgatorio, xvi. 106.

[2] *Convito*, iv. c. 5.

meant for the working world, but though he may have regarded "high Harry"[1] as an instrument of the divine purpose, he can hardly have hoped that the Emperor would prevail with the "malicious and foolish company" with whom he found himself in exile to restore the ideal state of things.[2] His hope is in posterity. "I will not," says his ancestor Cacciaguida to him in Paradise, "that thou envy thy neighbours, since the life that awaits thee in future goes farther than the punishment of their perfidies."[3] The city he conceives is the *Civitas Dei*,—an imperial Rome in which Christ himself is Roman, a spiritual Rome in which Christ is abbot of the cloister.[4] In this lofty allegorical application of spiritual ideas to actual affairs we shall have presently occasion to observe a strong, though probably a fortuitous, likeness between Dante and the English Langland.

Another note of Renaissance made itself heard in the writings of Petrarch. Touching each other as their sympathies did at so many points, it would be difficult to find a more striking contrast between two men of genius than between Petrarch and Dante. Both of them cultivated their studies in solitude, but while Dante had devoted himself, while he could, to the service of his country, and had been forced to prove in exile "how salt was the taste of another's bread," Petrarch, courted and flattered by popes and princes, deliberately declined the duties of active life, and indulged himself by preference in the pleasures of reverie. Both were scholars in the truest sense of the word; but Dante's learning was always directed, as his genius was curbed by a great practical end, "to promote the perfection of human life;"[5] Petrarch loved

[1] *Paradiso*, xvii. 82. [2] *Ibid.* xvii. 62. [3] *Ibid.* xvii. 97.

[4] *Purgatorio*, xxxii. 101—

cive
Di quella Roma onde Cristo è Romano;

and *Ibid.* xxvi. 128—

chiostro
Nel quale è Cristo abate del collegio.

[5] *Convito*, iv. c. 9. Compare

L'ingegno affreno più che non soglio
Perchè non corra che virtù nol guidi.
Inferno, xxvi. 21, 22.

and

Più non mi lascia gire il fren dell' arte.

books in themselves and for the enjoyments they furnished to his imagination. They shared a common and noble passion for the regeneration of Italy, but to Dante this was a necessary part of a universal moral system, to Petrarch it was little more than the luxury of inward sentiment.

The political ideas and writings of the latter represent, therefore, a long series of illusions. His brilliant imagination was nourished upon the *literæ humaniores* of Rome, and especially on Cicero, Livy, and Virgil, whom he interpreted, not through the severe medium of the scholastic philosophy, but by his own instinct and sympathy. Thus he found himself in actual touch with the thoughts and sentiments of antiquity, and, amidst the monuments of Roman greatness, fancied that the old Roman spirit was as living a reality to others as to himself. Once in Avignon, meeting some noble Roman ladies who had come there on a pilgrimage, he conversed with them on the state of affairs in the Eternal City. When they left him, "then," says he, "I first perceived where I was. For while the conversation lasted I was at Rome, and seemed to be looking on Cecilia, the wife of Metellus, and Sulpicia, the wife of Fulvius, and Cornelia, the wife of Gracchus, and Martia, the wife of Cato, and Æmilia, the wife of Africanus, and all the long line of illustrious women of old."[1] When the tribune Rienzi became for the moment master of Rome, Petrarch believed his country to be on the eve of a great moral revival, and his emotions broke forth in the beautiful ode beginning "Spirto Gentil"—

L' antiche mura ch' amor teme, ed ama
E trema mondo, quando si rimembra
Del tempo andato, e indietro si rivolve;
E i sassi dove fur chiuse le membra
Di lui che non saranno senza fama
S' il universo pria non si dissolve;
E tutto quel ch' una ruina involve,
Per te spera saldar ogni suo vizio.
O grandi Scipioni, o fedel Bruto,
Quanto v' aggrada, se gia è amor, venuto
Romor laggiù del ben locato uffizio;

[1] *Epistolæ Familiares*, lib. xvi. 8.

Com' era che Fabbrizio
Si facea lieto, udendo la novella,
E dice, "Roma mia sarà ancor bella."[1]

The hollowness of Rienzi's pretensions was soon exposed, yet Petrarch showed his generosity by not forsaking him after his fall, and, cherishing the idea that the rabble of Rome were the true descendants of the men who, after the battle of Cannæ, thanked Varro for not having despaired of the Republic, he addressed to the Roman people one of his usual manifestoes entreating them to interfere in behalf of their tribune. The opening of the letter is pathetic in its absurdity: "Apud te quidem, invictissime domitorque terrarum, Popule meus, apud te clam paucis res magna tractanda est." He proceeds:—

"Your power, I well know, is diminished; but, believe me, if any drop of your ancient blood remains, you have still no small majesty, no light influence. Venture something, I adjure you, by the memory of human affairs, by the ashes and glory of your ancestors, by the mercy of Jesus Christ, who bids us love our neighbour and succour the afflicted. Venture something, I beseech you, above all for that which honour bids you strive for, and which you cannot leave in silence without shame and dishonour; and even if not for his safety, at least for your own reputation, venture something if you would remain anything. I tell you plainly that if you are timid, if you despise yourselves, many will also despise you, none will respect you. . . . Only do so much as to open your mouths with one consent; let the world see that the Roman people speak with one voice. No man will anywhere treat *that* with ridicule or scorn; every man will listen

[1] The ancient walls that love venerates, and the world loves and trembles at, when it remembers the time that is gone, and revolves the past; and the stones wherein are enclosed the members of those who shall not be without glory until the world itself dissolve, and all that is now involved in one ruin, hopes through thee to heal itself of its every disease. O great Scipios, O faithful Brutus, how pleasing to you, if love is still yours, must be the rumour, that has come to you in your world, of office well bestowed! how must Fabricius have rejoiced, hearing the news, and have said, "My Rome shall yet be beautiful!"

to it with reverence and awe. Demand to have the captive back, or at least demand justice for him; one of these two things will be granted to you. And as you formerly, merely by sending a small embassy, delivered the king of Egypt when besieged by the Syrians, so now deliver your own citizen from his undeserved imprisonment."[1]

Disappointed in his hope of a revived Roman Republic, Petrarch reverted to Dante's monarchical ideal,[2] and in another of his rhetorical epistles invited the Emperor Charles IV. to save his country. His eloquence prevailed, but hardly had Charles crossed the Alps when he perceived the vanity of the hopes held out to him, and retreated ignominiously into Germany pursued by the taunts of Petrarch. Finally the poet, as his last hope, made an appeal to the Pope to restore the ancient order by returning from Avignon. "Rome," said he, "calls you here as a spouse, Christendom as her chief." The Pope was to use his influence with the Emperor. "May it seem just to you at least to restore to her her other consort, the Emperor, whom your predecessor Innocent VI. succeeded by a rash engagement in divorcing from her. Deign to remove that impediment, and to *command* that Cæsar should return to Rome. As long as Rome remains deprived of both her chiefs human affairs can never go right, nor can the Christian Republic enjoy peace. If either of you return, all will go well, if both, perfectly, and in the plenitude of glory and success." Urban V. came to Rome for a year, and then returned to Avignon in disgust. "Did not you," writes Petrarch to him, with bitter sarcasm, "like St. Peter, when you fled, meet Christ upon the way? '*Domine, quo vadis?*' 'I go to be crucified there again since you are departing.'"[3]

I have given the foregoing extracts because they vividly illustrate the spirit of the Renaissance in Italy,

[1] Epistle to the Roman People.
[2] "Nulla prorsus apud nos dubitatio relinquitur, monarchiam esse optimam relegendis reparandisque viribus Italis, quas longus bellorum civilium sparsit furor."—*Epist. Fam.* ii. 7.
[3] Reeve (Foreign Classics Series), *Petrarch*, p. 140.

both in its power and in its weakness. As the force of anarchy was greater in Italy than in any other European country, so the idea of the Roman Republic, the Roman Empire, and the civil order associated with them, raised more vivid memories in the minds of Italians. The deeper study of classical literature, and particularly of the letters of Cicero, opened to men of imagination like Petrarch a clearer view of the actual life of the past, and removed the veil of scholastic prepossession which seemed to separate it from the interests of the present. But the Italians were too near to the scenes of their ancient greatness not to be mastered by them. Their own political institutions were not strong enough to provide a basis of action for the ideas they derived from books; and in the models which they sought to imitate the former life was extinct. The civil conceptions, embodied in the masterpieces of classical literature, required to be transplanted to the north, and grafted on the stock of Teutonic nationality, before they could exercise a fertilising effect on the growth of political liberty.

It was precisely on account of the absence in him of any positive political aim, that the study of classical literature so powerfully influenced Boccaccio, the third member of the great Italian poetical triumvirate, and the one whose genius is perhaps the most characteristic product of the Renaissance in Italy. Boccaccio's art has nothing of the austere purpose of Dante, nothing of the ideal enthusiasm of Petrarch. Every form of practical life seems to have been distasteful to him. As a young man he refused to enter the legal profession to which his father wished to bind him. In his later years he was sent in the service of Florence on certain embassies, but seems to have performed his part without any personal interest. He mingled with the corrupt society of his time with little scandal, but with no indignation, and in a spirit which recalls a famous character in Milton:—

Belial, in act more graceful and humane,
A fairer person lost not heaven.

. . . . . .
. . His thoughts were low:
To vice industrious, but to nobler deeds
Timorous and slothful.

But, in the sphere of literature pure and simple, the civic spirit of the great classical writers made Boccaccio an enthusiast. He learned the secret of their style, and reading them, not as a pedant but as a man of the world, he so refined his taste that he perceived exactly what steps were necessary, in order to fit the thoughts he derived from them to the different genius of his own language. When he read Guido delle Colonne's *Story of Troy*, he saw at once how the romantic episode of Chryseis, related by that barbarous author, could be combined with the spirit of Ovid's *Art of Love*. A good Latin scholar as the times went, the perusal of Statius' *Thebais* did not move him to mere formal imitation; but, feeling the human interest of the story, he transmuted such parts of it as pleased him into an Italian form, with all the Teutonic accessories of hunting, hawking, tournaments, and love, required to recommend the *Teseide* to the taste of his readers. By the same magic process he improved the rude framework of the trouvères' *fabliau* into a vehicle for the urbanity of Florentine wit. Indeed nothing is more typical of the moral indifference and the artistic skill of Boccaccio than the design of the *Decameron*, the picture of the beautiful garden, with its gay group of citizens, who sing their songs and tell their tales while their plague-stricken city lies almost at their feet. In work like this we seem still to be listening to the voice of Petronius Arbiter, full of the old grace, ease, and refinement; speaking, it is true, in a new language, but so little changed in itself, that it might seem as if thirteen centuries of Christianity had passed away without leaving any trace on the human mind. As regards form, the *Decameron* is the first example in European literature of the revived classic spirit, the principle of which is the direct imitation of Nature, and which, after working so powerfully in the

kindred, but nobler, genius of Chaucer, reached its maturity in the style of Ariosto, Cervantes, and Molière.

The effects in France of the reviving spirit of civil liberty and ancient learning were quite of a contrary character to those in. Italy. France was the part of Europe farthest removed from the influence of Roman traditions, both in Church and State, and also the one in which the genius of feudalism was most strongly developed. When the Empire of Charlemagne was divided, a natural repulsion severed the nominal bond of connection between the Eastern half, which carried with it the Imperial inheritance, and the more fertile portion, which contained the Western half of the Frankish monarchy; and in that kingdom itself, the sovereigns of the house of Capet exercised as yet little more than the shadow of authority over the great vassals by whom their territory was surrounded. True, the outlines of the future absolute monarchy were beginning to disclose themselves; but, as late as the middle of the thirteenth century, the feudal principle found emphatic expression in the Code of St. Louis, which laid down the rule that no proclamation of law should be valid beyond the limits of the royal domain. The Dukes of Normandy, the Counts of Brittany, Champagne, Armagnac, Artois, and Languedoc, were supreme in their own provinces in all matters relating to Justice, Taxation, and Currency.

In like manner the central power of the Church exerted in France a comparatively feeble influence. The Gallican Church recognised theoretically the supremacy of the Pope. But in practice the latter had to rely, for the maintenance of his spiritual authority, chiefly on the disciplined propaganda of the preaching orders, and so long as these orders continued to place at his disposal men qualified to command the schools, he was able through them to control the power of the University of Paris. It was evident, however, that the supply of minds like St. Thomas Aquinas must at some time fail, and that then the religious and intellectual energy of the orders would be insufficient to cope with the abiding local influence of

the Gallican hierarchy and the independent constitution of the University. Before the advent of the Schoolmen the first notes of spiritual revolt had been sounded by Berengar and Abelard; and when William de Saint Amour's book, *Concerning the Perils of the Last Times*, was condemned by Papal Bull, the whole of the University rallied round their rector in opposition to the authority of Pope and King.[1]

Out of this spirit of local independence arose two results, both of which reflected themselves vividly in the French literature of those times. The first was the large development of the institutions of feudalism. A society grew up which, in defect of any central system of authority, was scarcely raised above the level of tribal barbarism, but which was closely bound together by the freemasonry of custom and sentiment, and most tenacious of its rights in each district within its sovereignty. The seat of this society was the Castle; and, as has been already said, the lords within the castle were careful to separate their manners from those of their subjects without, by all the distinctions of caste. An image of the artificial sentiments of the castellated aristocracy is presented in the poetry of the troubadours. For that the inspiration of the Provençals was not a spontaneous outbreak of local imagination, but an elaborate system, having its base in the customs and institutions of the time, is an opinion capable of historical proof. Chivalry was itself the code of feudal life; and while, on its military side, it defined the rules of knightly conduct, in the social sphere it had a far wider application, and exercised a jurisdiction over all those difficult and delicate circumstances which regulate the order of manners and the intercourse between the sexes. The standard of a knight's conduct in the field was, of course, determined by the universal laws of chivalry; but beyond what was there required of him, his behaviour in refined society was strictly regulated by the Courts of Love.

These institutions, which seem to have been imitated from the courts in which the feudal lord administered justice,

[1] See Milman's *History of Latin Christianity* (1864), vol. vi. pp. 343-352.

can be traced back as far as the middle of the twelfth century. They were presided over by great ladies, conspicuous among whom were Marie, Countess of Champagne, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Ermengard of Narbonne. The laws of "Love" administered in them were simply the rules of pleasing—showing one's self "aimable"—in feminine society, the standard being determined by a code of 31 articles, which were fabled to have been attached to a ring on the neck of a falcon, found by a knight of the court of King Arthur. These define, with great precision and delicacy of observation, the signs of true love, and what may be required of a lover. Whenever a doubtful case arose, it was referred to one of the presidents of the Courts of Love, who decided the point of equity, by reference to the statutes, with a nicety of logic rivalling that of the "précieuses" of the seventeenth century. At the close of the twelfth, or the beginning of the thirteenth, century, these cases were collected by a writer calling himself André le Chapelain, who made them the basis for a scientific treatise entitled *De Amore*, in which he discussed the whole subject of Love in the spirit of the statutes. Love is, in André's treatise, defined as "a passion arising from sight and thought";[1] but it is described as being mainly an affection of the mind produced by beautiful manners.[2] Recognising that eloquence is a powerful factor in arousing this emotion, the author shows in a number of imaginary dialogues the different ways in which a proposal of love should be made, so as to befit the social rank of the parties concerned. In each case the male speaker opens his suit with an argument to prove that he ought to be listened to, while the lady, who is an equally expert logician, meets him with objections, which have to be removed before she will yield an inch of her defensive position. Here, for example, is an argument, in which one of these models of female virtue entrenches herself against the too eager assaults of her suitor:—

"Says the woman:—'You seem to me to have wandered

[1] "Est igitur illa passio innata ex visione et cogitatione."—Andreæ Capellani, lib. i. cap. 1.

[2] *Ibid.* lib. i. cap. 6.

far from the road of love, and to be a transgressor against the excellent and fitting custom of lovers, in that you ask for love so quickly. For when a wise and well-schooled lover addresses a lady, hitherto quite unknown to him, at a first visit, he ought not to demand her favour with an explicit declaration of love, but to take pains to furnish his lady with a knowledge of his character, and in all his words to approve himself gentle and agreeable to her: next let him take care that in his absence all his deeds commend him rightly to his lady; and then at last he may safely venture to ask for her love. But you have disturbed this order by a palpable breach of rules, which I suppose you have committed, either because you supposed that I should show myself over-easy in granting your request, or because you are not skilled in the art of love. Hence your love must justly remain under suspicion.'"[1]

This passage by itself is sufficient to show how far feudal society must have advanced in intellectual refinement, in order to establish such scientific rules of intercourse between the sexes. The poetry of the troubadours is simply a lyrical rendering of this prevailing social fashion. For with all the appearance of exuberant passion, flowing sentiment, inexhaustible fancy, their verse will be found on examination to be merely variations of two or three main themes, all of which are contained in the statutes of Love. The following may serve as examples:—

Rule 2. Nemo duplici potest amore ligari.

"Every other attachment is foreign to my heart. The love that I have for you can never leave me. The passion I feel is such that I cannot conceive any other like it."—*Giraud de Salignac.*[2]

"O dear lady, I am and shall be yours for ever. Devoted to your orders I am your servant and liegeman. I belong to you for ever. You were my first love; you will be my last. My happiness will end only with my life."—*Bernard de Ventadour.*[3]

Rule 20. Amorosus semper est timorosus.

"I feel at once vivid joy and painful sadness when I am in your

[1] Translated from Andreæ Capellani, *De Amore*, lib. i. c. 6.

[2] Raynouard, *Choix des Troubadours*, vol. ii. p. xx. In this and the following extracts I have translated Raynouard's translation, which is only a paraphrase of the original.

[3] *Ibid.* ii. p. xix.

presence: the timidity which prevents me from avowing the love my heart burns with secretly makes me sad: the pleasure of gazing on the most charming of women makes me joyous."—*Elias de Barjols.*[1]

Rule 15. Omnis consuevit amans in aspectu coamantis pallescere.

"The moment I see my love a sudden fear seizes me: my eye is troubled; my colour flies; I tremble like a leaf that the wind shakes; I have no more reason than a child; so much does love disturb me."—*Bernard de Ventadour.*[2]

Rule 3. Qui non celat amare non potest.

"If you deign to grant me any favour, dearest of ladies, know that I would suffer death rather than commit the slightest indiscretion. Ah! I pray God to end my days the moment that I shall commit the crime of betraying the secret of your goodness."—*Arnauld de Marueil*[3]

Rule 30. Verus amans assiduâ sine intermissione coamantis imagine detinetur.

"I do well to avoid and leave you, dear lady, for such is the liveliness of my love that it is impossible for my heart to be quit of your image. Even during my sleep I imagine myself to laugh and frolic in your company; I enjoy supreme happiness. But when I awake, I see, I perceive, I feel that this imaginary happiness is changed into real torment."—*Arnauld de Marueil*[4]

In short, in the idea of the chivalrous society of the thirteenth century, to love was a liberal education, and the art of poetry, as practised by the Provençals, lay in the elaboration of a peculiar sentiment and language, which served to separate the manners of a ruling caste from those of the unsophisticated crowd. The fashion of chivalry reached its height during the Crusades, and having found its poetical expression in the exalted though artificial songs of the troubadours, crystallised, as we shall presently see, into an allegorical and didactic style.

On the other hand, in opposition to the ruling feudal society, itself so lawless and incoherent, and distinguished by a code of manners in many respects so fantastic, there was growing, in the heart of France, the embryo of the people, the nucleus of the Tiers État, representing the municipal and commercial interests of the great towns. Allied with the bourgeois, sometimes against the feudal aristocracy, sometimes against his ecclesiastical superiors,

[1] Raynouard, *Choix des Troubadours*, ii. p. xx.
[2] *Ibid.* ii. p. xii. [3] *Ibid.* ii. p. xxiii. [4] *Ibid.* ii. p. xxii.

and always against the mendicant monastic armies of the Pope, was the scholar of the university. The fusion of these two forces produced the peculiar character of the French Renaissance, which, through the whole course of its history, was occupied less with the construction of practical political liberty, than with undermining by keen analysis the strongholds of feudal privilege. This party too had its poetical instrument in the rude *fabliau* of the trouvère, or the satirical *chanson* of the burgess, which formed a natural counterpoise to the lyrics of the troubadours. Curiously enough, by a happy effort of invention, the opposition of the feudal and democratic principles is reflected in a single French poem, which therefore furnishes as clear an image of the thoughts which, in the thirteenth century, were dividing the mind of France, as the *Divina Commedia* presents of the state of Italy. And not of France alone. Wherever the institutions of feudalism were established, the shock communicated by this poem was felt, so that whoever wishes to understand the spirit of the great majority of poems written in England between the reigns of Edward III. and Henry VIII. must first make the acquaintance of the *Romance of the Rose.*

Le Roman de la Rose was the work of two authors, of whom the second took up and completed, in an analytical and satirical vein, what the first had begun in a spirit of chivalrous sentiment, but had left unfinished. William de Lorris, a trouvère of Touraine, in the district near the Loire, seems to have written his part about 1240. As far as can be ascertained, he had no immediate predecessor in the allegorical style which he adopted as the vehicle for expressing the sentiments of the Courts of Love; but many of his materials were derived from text-books commonly used in the schools, such as Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, Alanus de Insulis' *De Planctu Naturæ*, and the *Somnium Scipionis* of Macrobius. Taking his initial hint from the last-named book, he feigns to have found himself in a dream near a beautiful garden, the exterior wall of which was covered with representations of the infirmities of human nature, such as Old Age and Poverty, and of the

peculiarly anti-chivalric vices, Hate, Envy, Covetousness, and Avarice. Entering the garden which surrounds the Palace of Love, he finds there all that is pleasant and delightful, and sees the two chief members of Love's *comitatus*, Leisure and Wealth, and, above all, the beautiful lady, Bel Accueil or Fair Reception. Nothing vulgar or unrefined is admitted into this company.[1] When the new-comer enters the garden Love himself appears and aims at him five arrows—Beauty, Candour, Sincerity, Courtesy, Sweet Conversation—which, as may be imagined, overwhelm his heart, already inflamed with a passionate desire to possess a rose-bud of unequalled beauty, growing in the neighbourhood of Fair Reception.

With the over-confidence of an unskilled lover—which we have seen reproved elsewhere in the dialogues of André le Chapelain—he asks leave to touch and gather this rose. Whereupon Fair Reception in much confusion gives place to Shame, Fear, and Jealousy. The lover is shut out of the garden, and in his distress betakes himself to an accomplished friend, who gives him long and elaborate advice as to the manner in which he should conduct his suit. This homily is of the greatest interest, as illustrating both the manners of chivalry and the literary standard on which the new Art of Love was formed William de Lorris had evidently read Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* with great attention, and followed the method of that poem, while at the same time he was well aware that the precepts it contains were entirely inapplicable to the society for which he himself wrote.

Thus while the Roman poet speaks throughout with cynical frankness, the trouvère is almost prudish in his refinements.[2] The lover, he says, contrary to Ovid's advice, must be minutely particular in the matter of dress,

[1] Si me baiseras en la bouche,
A cui nus vilains hons n'atouche,
Je n'i laisse mie atouchier
Chascun vilain, chacun porchier
Roman de la Rose, [illegible]

[2] Ja por nommer vilaine chose
Ne doit la bouche estre desclose,
Je ne tiens pas a courtois homme
Qui orde chose et laide nomme. [illegible]

and especially as to his boots, sleeves, gloves, and belt.[1] He must have all the qualities of an accomplished knight,—riding, singing, music, and dancing.[2] Above all he must be free from avarice.[3] Fortified with these instructions the lover returns to the garden, and urges his plea with such success, that Fair Reception consents to see him again, though with a hedge between them. At this interview the lover having managed to advance some points, is at last emboldened to ask if he may kiss the rose. Fair Reception replies, not however very discouragingly, that this is going rather far; but Venus, who in all the numerous poems of this class plays the part of reconciler, reproves the lady in a long lecture, and persuades her to grant the lover's request. The consequences are terrible. Slander, Shame, and Jealousy wake Danger, and the lover is turned out of the garden a second time, while Fair Reception is not only confined in a fortress four-square, with a castle at each corner, under the command of one of the four personages just mentioned, but is even placed under the keeping of an old duenna, who does not seem to enjoy the advantage of being an abstraction.

At this point William de Lorris broke off his narrative. Whether he was tired of his long-drawn allegory, whether invention failed him, or whether he died, is uncertain; but his fragmentary work at least shows that he had no other intention in his poem than to reflect the aristocratic spirit of chivalric manners, as embodied in the statutes of the Courts of Love. Love and his characteristic companions, Wealth and Leisure; the beautiful garden, like that in the *Decameron*, removed from all the diseases and evil affections of human life; the love-suit protracted according to the usual conventions; are quite in the manner of André le Chapelain's text-book. William's successor, Jehan de Meung, makes Love say of him: "When Tibullus died I broke my bow weeping; I cut my wings; I scattered the feathers on his tomb. Venus, my mother, had not so much

[1] *Roman de la Rose*, 2152-2164. See Ovid, *Ars Amat.* i. 509:—

Forma viros neglecta decet.

[2] *Roman de la Rose*, 2205-2218. [3] *Ibid.* 2226.

to weep in the loss of her Adonis. I have no longer to console me Catullus, Ovid, or Gallus; but William de Lorris remains, whom Jealousy exposes at this moment to the greatest dangers. He is worthy of my support on account of his long service, and for having begun the Romance in which my laws and precepts shall be taught. He will carry on his work up to the point at which he will say to Fair Reception—

> Moult sui durement esmaiés
> Que entr'oblié ne m'aiés.
> Si en ai duel et desconfort,
> Jamais n'iert rien qui me confort,
> Si je pers votre bienvoillance;
> Car je n'ai mes aillors fiance.

William shall then rest in peace. May his tomb breathe for ever an odour of incense, of balm and of aloes. After him shall come Limping John, born at Meun-on-Loire, who shall be faithful to me all his life, and shall show, I trust, wisdom enough to be for ever far removed from Lady Reason, my enemy."[1]

William de Lorris had broken off his narrative with an exclamation of hopelessness on the part of the lover—

> Et si je l'ai perdu espoir
> A poi que ne m'en desespoir—:[2]

Jehan de Meung catches up the word: "Despair? Nay! I will not despair—for if hope were to fail me I should show myself a coward. In this thought I will take courage;"[3] and he accordingly again faces the adventure. But the perils which now beset him in the shape of arguments and lectures might have deterred any less resolute person. For, in the first place, Reason descends from her tower, and asks him if he is satisfied with the master whom he has chosen, and whose real nature she undertakes to expose to him in an argument extending over more than 2000 lines. In the first place she defines Love

[1] *Roman de la Rose*, v. 10,537. [2] *Ibid.* v. 4068.

[3] Desespoir? las! je non ferai,
Je ne m'en desespererai;
Car s'esperance m'erst faillans
Je ne seroie pas vaillans:
En li me doi reconforter.—*R. de la R.* 4070.

in terms which must have caused André le Chapelain and William de Lorris to turn in their graves. "Love," she says, "is a hateful peace, an amorous hate."[1] It is, moreover, "an evil which obliges us to search for all the means of seeing, addressing, and touching a person of the other sex."[2] "Men," she continues, in a bitter passage to which Christine de Pisan afterwards called attention in her *Epître au Dieu d'Amours*—"men often affect to be stricken with this disease before they really are so; they ill-use women, and after all it is the best course;" for "it is better to deceive than to be deceived."[3] The end of the division between the two sexes, says Reason, is simply the continuation of the species. Any pleasure attached to their intercourse is accidental, and should not cause the true end to be forgotten. The sermonising Abstraction then proceeds, in her most discursive vein, to blame the disposition of the young, merely in order to show that she has read Cicero's *De Senectute;* and praises Friendship as opposed to Love, to display her acquaintance with the *De Amicitia.* Having thus got into the stride of her philosophy, she goes on to praise the happiness of the independent poor man, and to reflect on the different kinds of unhappiness in the life of merchants, lawyers, physicians, wandering preachers, and the king himself. All this, rambling as it is, is full of vigorous *genre* painting which gives it a certain interest for the modern reader, though it must have been inexpressibly tiresome to the lover, who after a while thinks it advisable to divert the flow of Reason's eloquence, by asking her whether justice or love is the greater virtue. In answering, Love, Reason appears to be guilty of some inconsistency; but we understand her meaning when we find that she has seized the opportunity to make a violent attack upon the king's judges,[4] and to introduce the story

[1] Amors est pais haïneuse,
Amors est haïne amoureuse.—*Roman de la Rose*, 4307.

[2] *Ibid.* 4409.

[3] *Ibid.* 4409.

[4] Mais or vendent les jugemens,
Tuit s'efforcent de l'autrui pendre.
Tex juges fait le larron pendre
Qui miex déust estre pendus,
Se jugement li fust rendus.—*Ibid.* 5603.

of Appius and Virginia. She next proceeds to transfer from Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ* the allegorical description of the goddess Fortune, so often utilised by poets in the Middle Ages, to which she appends a list of unfortunate men—Nero, Crassus, Sisigambis, Manfred, Conradin—and as the conclusion of her argument, demands

> C'est que tu me vueilles amer,
> Et que le dieu d'Amors despises,
> Et que Fortune rien ne prises.[1]

The lover, who has, throughout her long tirade, shown a certain skill in putting Reason on her defence, now reproaches her, in the spirit of William de Lorris, for using coarse language, and Reason defends herself by alleging the necessity of calling things by their proper names.

Having at last escaped from this long-winded antagonist, the lover returns for advice to his old friend and confidant, whose sentiments seem to have been revolutionised since his first appearance in the pages of William de Lorris, and are now coloured with all the pagan effrontery of Ovid. "A great heavy purse all crammed with besants," says this friend, "is the one thing needful."[2] He indeed expresses his regrets for the departure of the Golden Age, thereby making an opening for reference to his favourite poet; but he introduces, in the manner of the *fabliau*, a modern husband complaining of the extravagance of his wife, and inveighing against women and marriage.[3] Returning to Ovid and the Golden Age, the friend maintains that the first men knew nothing of marriage. Then Jason brought the Golden Fleece, after which came riches, poverty, oppression, fraud. Excessive evils required excessive remedies: it became necessary to preserve the rights of property in goods and wife.

[1] *R. de la R.* v. 6895.

[2] *Ibid.* v. 8385; cf. Ovid, *Ars Amat.* i. 419-436.

[3] Preude femme, par Saint Denis,
Il en est mains que de fenis . . .
Tout estes, serés ou fustes,
De fait ou de volenté putes.—*R. de la R.* 9192.

This seems to be the original source of "Every woman is at heart a rake"; though of course Pope got the idea from more modern authors.

Hence arose marriage and monarchy. "Men chose among themselves a big-boned 'villain,' the largest and stoutest man they could find, and made him their prince and lord."[1]

When the lover has been sufficiently schooled in these new opinions, he tries to re-enter the garden by means of Prodigality, but seeing Poverty coming, he desists. Love, however, comes to his aid, and after making him recite his twelve commandments, promises to send him all his barons to assist him in his siege of the fortress. The barons' names are Leisure, Nobility-of-Heart, Riches, Frankness, Pity, Liberality, Courage, Honour, Courtesy, Pleasure, Simplicity, Beauty, Youth, Patience, Humility, and Discretion, but with this refined company come two strange abstractions, Constrained Abstinence and False-Seeming, whose presence is explained by the consideration that, in order to please ladies, it is necessary to use deceit. False-Seeming is dressed in the garb of the preaching friars, or Dominicans, and the author reflects in the character the bitter hatred towards this order felt by the scholars of the University of Paris. He is represented as asking alms, but living on the best; and as carrying Bulls which permit him to confess, while he absolves without hearing a word of confession. He is also a propagator of the mysterious *Everlasting Gospel*, the heretical book against which the University had protested in the days of William de Saint-Amour.[2] The part which False-Seeming plays is curious and characteristic, for after the siege has been pushed with such vigour that Slander is driven to capitulate, the friar having granted her terms, cuts out her tongue with a razor concealed under his Dominican robe.

The fortress, however, still holds out; and at last the lover has recourse through bribes to the old duenna, first mentioned by William de Lorris, who undertakes to per-

[1] Ung grand vilain entre eux eslurent,
Le plus ossu de quanque furent,
Le plus corsu et le greignor,
Si le furent prince et seignor.—*R. de la R.* 9645.

[2] For the history of this curious book see Milman's *History of Latin Christianity*, vol. vii. pp. 348-350.

transmitted: greatness of sentiment alone can give it. Clerks ought to be accounted more noble than barons, since the former are better acquainted with the examples of good and evil life, and the reasons for preferring good to evil. Gawain and Count Robert of Artois are selected as the models of nobility.

Finally Nature despatches Genius to the aid of the god of Love, and the new commander-in-chief makes a long speech to the army besieging the fortress. He excommunicates all who war against their own inclinations, thus furnishing Rabelais with the hint for his "Fais ce que vouldras." Those who have followed their inclinations and have left behind them many children will enjoy heavenly happiness, provided that before dying they receive absolution for their sins. Genius then throws his torch into the air, and the flame, penetrating into the prison of the lady, melts the hearts of all those who are keeping her prisoner.

I have given the above analysis of the *Romance of the Rose* because, in spite of its rambling and incoherent form, it is the work of a poet of extraordinary power, and illustrates, more vividly than any poem of the Middle Ages, the inward nature of the political and literary forces which combined, on the one hand for the overthrow of French feudalism, and on the other for the development of the French Renaissance. From the first to the last line of the part composed by Jehan de Meung the poem bristles with fierce oppositions of thought. The perfumed and superfine fancies of the courtly minstrel are here confronted with the brutal plainness of the bourgeois satirist; Nature and Reason—if it is permissible to apply a homely metaphor to such venerable abstractions—like bulls in the china shop of chivalry, crash about among all the delicate and mystical ideals—the principle of allegiance, the pride of ancestry, the worship of women—with which imagination had adorned the Feudal System; the lofty ascetic aims of the mendicant orders are contrasted with their actual performances; the pagan learning of the university scholar rises in revolt against the authority of the Schoolmen; Ovid and Cicero encounter

André le Chapelain; and the materialistic speculations of Arabian philosophy prevail over the ethics of Aristotle.

It is not surprising that such a lawless force should have produced a vast disturbance among the established institutions of the period. For some time, indeed, the revolutionary significance of Jehan de Meung's work remained undetected. But as the tide of feudalism and scholasticism continued to ebb through the fourteenth century, the scandal of so popular a poem naturally increased. In 1399 Christine de Pisan, as the champion of the ladies, attacked it in her *Epître au Dieu d'Amours*, with all the ardour and delicacy of her sex; and in 1402 a more formidable antagonist, John Gerson, the famous Chancellor of the University of Paris, wrote his *Traité contre le roumant de la Rose*, on behalf of the Christian religion. This work takes the form of an allegory, in which the author feigns that he found himself in the Court of Christianity—the imagery is plainly borrowed from the Courts of Love—presided over by Lady Canonical Justice, and her assessors Mercy and Truth, who received the complaint of Chastity "contre les forfaitures intolerables que lui avoir faites un qui se faisoit nommer le Fol Amoureux."[1] But this is to anticipate.

Very different, and for the moment far less apparent, were the effects of the Renaissance in England. Politically speaking, in the middle of the thirteenth century, no country in Europe had conceived, with anything like the clearness of England, the idea of national life and of the just relations between Church and State. Many opposite conditions had combined to produce this favourable result. Of these the most important was perhaps the insular position of the kingdom, which separated it from the imperial system of Charlemagne, and, while the continent of Europe was being swept by the tumultuary tides of feudalism, permitted the Saxon tribes to bring their institutions under the control of a single government. Had the Saxon race, however, remained in complete isolation, a certain slowness of temperament, which is apt

[1] *Histoire Littéraire de France*, vol. xxiii p. 47.

to disguise its more heroic qualities, might have sunk it in torpor and decay. Happily it was seldom left long without feeling the spur of external aggression or internal suffering. The gradual conversion of the whole country to Christianity brought England into the religious system of Europe. The invasions of the Danes helped to promote the feeling of national unity, and infused new blood and energy into the northern part of the island. The Normans from the south communicated a fresh shock to the national life by the introduction of feudal institutions, and of a ruling race possessed of all the qualities in which the exhausted Saxon dynasty was deficient. Overwhelmed for the time by the Conquest, the English, nevertheless, preserved their ancient national traditions, and this element has never failed finally to determine the balance of power between the opposing principles and parties out of which the constitution has been developed.

Thus a strong central power in the king was necessary to maintain the predominance of the conquering race; and a succession of great rulers—Henry I., Henry II., and Edward I.—proved themselves equal to their position. Weakened, however, by the inadequate right of inheritance among the early Norman kings, and by the incapacity of some of their successors, the Crown, in its frequent struggles with its great vassals, was forced to rely on the support of the people, while at other times the nobles turned for assistance to the same quarter. Hence arose the charter of Henry I., *Magna Carta*, and the *Confirmatio Cartarum* under Edward I. At the coronation of Edward II. a primate of Norman birth asked the king, "Will you grant and keep, and by your oath confirm, to the people of England, the laws and customs to them granted by the ancient kings of England, your righteous and godly predecessors, and especially the laws, customs, and privileges granted to the clergy and people by the glorious king, Saint Edward your predecessor?"[1] To the same "laws, customs, and privileges," inherent in the Saxon nation, the Norman barons themselves, in alliance with the people, appealed, when

[1] Stubbs's *Constitutional History of England*, vol. ii. p. 344.

their liberties were threatened by the power of the Crown, now grown excessive by established inherited right. And so too, in the repeated struggles between Church and king, the support of an organised public sympathy was thrown into one scale or the other, according as the opposite principle appeared the more dangerous to the interests of freedom and justice.

In many different directions the English people, in the thirteenth century, is seen to be forming for itself a school of thought, closely resembling on a larger scale that "political education" which was the offspring of the best days of civic freedom in Greece and Rome, and the parent of all that was greatest in Greek and Latin literature. The idea of England as a nation presents itself in the utterances of every order of Englishmen, strongly mixed, no doubt, with class selfishness, yet instinct with the genuine spirit of patriotism. It animates the eloquence not only of the representatives of the laity in the House of Commons, but of the clergy in their Synods. It appears in the speech of Edward I. when he appealed to his Parliament for supplies, on the ground that what concerns all is the business of all; in Simon de Montfort's elementary scheme of popular representation; in the opposition offered by Grossetete, Bishop of Lincoln, to the induction of foreign priests into English benefices. And, lastly, it is reflected with great vividness in the rude popular poetry, which, from the reign of John, began to circulate freely among the clergy and the commons.

These political songs were composed in English, French, or Latin, and sometimes in maccaroni verses of all three languages. They range over every kind of subject and style, from the satirical *sirvente* of the noble troubadour, who attacks the king for his cowardice in not defending his continental possessions, down to the complaint of the husbandman groaning under the burdens that oppress his industry. Many, perhaps most, of them seem to have been composed by the clergy, in the various styles adapted to catch the taste of the audience of the moment. In all of them the point to be taken is put forward with the most outspoken freedom, and is embodied in a metrical form, meant to be

remembered and repeated. The following examples will illustrate what has been said. A husbandman in the reign of Edward I. laments his hard lot—

> Luther is to leosen ther ase lutil ys,
> And haveth monie hynen that hopieth thereto;
> The hayward heteth us harm to habben of his;
> The bailiff bockneth us bale, and weneth wel do;
> The wodeward waiteth us wo that loketh under rys;
> Ne mai us ryse no rest richeis ne ro.
> Thus me pileth the pore that is of lute pris:
> Nede in swot and in swynk swynde mot swo.
>
> Nede he mot swynde thah he hade swore,
> That nath nout en hod his hed for te hude.
> Thus wil walketh in londe, and lawe is for-lore,
> And al is piked of the pore, the prikyare's prude.[1]

Another song, very popular in the first years of the fourteenth century, points to the sympathy between the clergy and the poor, who were in alliance against the extortions of the rich and powerful. Something of the spirit of John Ball, though kept within due bounds, animates such sentiments as these: "Were Holy Church to put forth her might, and also the law of the land, then covetousness and injustice should be banished out of the land. Holy Church should withhold its judgment neither for fear nor love, nor should she forbear from showing her might for fear of the boast of lords in high place; nor from interdicting and admonishing all those, whoever they be, that rob law-abiding men, and those 'hoblers' in particular that take from the husbandman the fruit of the earth; men ought not to bury them in any church, but cast them out like a dog."[2] To illustrate his text the poet tells with

[1] Evil it is *to lose* when there is but little; and many hinds there are that hope to get it: the hedge-ward promises us harm, if we take of his; the bailiff threatens us with evil, and intends certainly to do it; the woodward has woe in store for us that look (for fuel) under the boughs; neither riches nor repose come or remain for us. Thus men *strip the* poor man that is of little value: needs must he thus waste away *in sweat* and toil. Needs must he waste though he be sworn [to his lord], that hath no hood wherein to hide his head. Thus will walks in the land, and law is lost, and all the horseman's finery is picked from the poor.—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 149. The obscure allusion to the "hood" may possibly have reference to the fact that a "villein" might not leave his lord's service to become a priest or monk.

[2] Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 196.

great humour the fable of the Fox, the Wolf, and the Ass. Once upon a time the Lion, hearing evil reports of the Wolf and the Fox, summoned them to court to answer for their misdeeds. These culprits took the precaution to send presents to court beforehand, but the Ass, who was also included in the indictment, relying on his innocence, sent nothing. When the Fox was called upon to plead, he lied, asserting that he had bought his hens and geese and carried them home on his back, and the Lion taking his word, let him go free. The Wolf disdained to lie, and admitted that he had killed a few kids and sheep on the downs, but maintained that he had done no harm, and his plea also was accepted by the Lion, who decided that he had only done after his nature. Then turning to the Ass, the Lion asked—

"Sei thou me, Asse, wat hast i-do?
Me thenchith thou cannist no gode.
Whi nadistou, as other mo?
Thou come of lither stode."

"Sertis, Sire, not ie noȝt;
Ie ete sage alnil gras,—
More harm nei did ie noȝt,
Therfor i-wreiid ie was."

"Bel ami, that was mis-do,
That was aȝe thi kund,
For to ete such gras so.—
Hastilich ȝe him bind.

"Al his bonis ȝe to-draw,
Loke that ȝe noȝt lete;
And that ie ȝive al for lawe,
That his fleis be al i-frette."[1]

[1] "Say, Ass, what hast thou done? Methinks thou canst do nothing good. Why hast thou not done as all the others? Thou comest from an evil place." "Certes, sire, I know nothing of it. I eat only sage and grass. No more harm than this I did: therefore I was accused." "Good friend, that was ill-done: that was against thy nature, to eat grass so. Bind him quickly; let all his bones be drawn asunder: look that ye leave him not: and that I give as my sentence that his flesh be all torn to pieces."—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 200.

The song ends—

Anureth God and holi church,
And ʒivith the pouir that habbith nede,
So Godis wille ʒe ssul wirche,
And joi of heven hab to mede.
To which joi us bring
Jhesus Crist heven king.[1]

This song is inspired by the love of stories about beasts and birds, which the Teutonic races perhaps brought with them from their old homes in the East. In the following passage, from a poem on Edward II.'s violation of a charter he had confirmed, the Anglo-Saxon fondness for proverbial jingles is apparent. Four wise men are supposed to deliver their sentiments on the occasion, of whom the first two, who are also the most intelligible, speak thus—

The firste seide, "I understonde
Ne may no king wel ben in londe
Under God Almihte,
But he cun himself rede
Hou he shall in londe lede
Everi man wid rihte.
For miht is riht,
Liht is niht,
And fiht is fliht.
For miht is riht, the lond is laweles.
For niht is liht, the lond is loreles,
For fiht is fliht, the lond is nameles."

That other seide a word ful god,
"Whoso roweth aʒein the flod,
Of sorwe he shal drinke;
Also it fareth bi the unsele,
A man shal have litel hele
That agein to swinke.
Nu on is two,
Another [And wel ?] is wo,
And frend is fo.
For on is two, that lond is streintheles;
For wel is wo, the lond is reutheles;
For frend is fo, the lond is loveles."[2]

[1] Honour God and Holy Church, and give to the poor that have need. So shall ye do God's will, and have the joy of heaven as your reward. To which joy may Jesus Christ, heaven's King, bring us.—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 205.

[2] The first said, "I understand that no king may be prosperous in his land under God Almighty unless he can counsel himself how to lead every man in the

In all these songs in the vernacular speech is heard the bitter cry of the Saxon *ceorl*, whom long decay and the introduction into England of the Feudal System had sunk to the hopeless condition of "villenage." Deprived of the customary rights of wood and hay attached to his holding, exposed to extortionate demands by the tax-collector, and to the petty tyranny of the royal purveyors, the position of the villein had become almost intolerable. To meet the exactions of his different oppressors he was forced to sell his green corn, his horse, and even his seed[1]; and as early as the reign of Edward I. a great rising of the commons was anticipated by the song-writers, though it was actually delayed till the time of Richard II.[2] These rude outbursts of homely feeling, with their pathetic undernote of religious resignation, show us better even than the statutes and ordinances of the period, why the followers of Wat Tyler sought to destroy the Green Wax, or rate-rolls of the Hundred, and all records of villenage.[3]

But they show us also, in their uncouth and archaic strains, how great were the difficulties of expressing even the most elementary feelings poetically in the vulgar tongue. Most of the surviving political songs of the period are

land with justice. [illegible]
might is right, the [illegible]
without learning; [illegible]
next said a very go[illegible]
of sorrow. So it f[illegible]
by striving against it. Now one is two, well is woe, friend is foe Because one is two, the land is without strength; because well is woe, the land is without pity; because friend is foe, the land is without love."—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 254.

[1] Song of the Husbandman, *passim*, Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 151.

[2] Gentz a tiel meschief quod nequeunt plus dare,
Je me doute, s'ils ussent chief, quod vellent levare.
Ibid. p. 186.

[3] Ʒet cometh budeles [beadles] with muche bost,
"Greythe [get] me silver to the grene wax:
Thou art writen y my writ that thou wost" [what thou knowest].
Mo then ten sythen [more than ten times] told y my tax.
Thenne mot yet habbe hennen a-rost,
Feyre on fyshe day lamprey ant lax" [salmon].
Ibid. p. 151.

The roast fowls and fish were doubtless demanded for the royal purveyance. As to the Green Wax, see Stubbs's *Constitutional History of England* (1880), vol. ii. p. 492.

written either in Latin, the language with which the clerical composers were best acquainted, in French, or in a medley of French and Latin. When French, or French and Latin, is used, it may be inferred that the audience addressed is of that middling class which, as we see from the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, possessed a few scraps of Latin, and would have been able, with a little explanation, to follow the meaning of the song.[1] Here is a specimen of a maccaroni song written against the king's taxes, and especially against the custom of seizing the wool, which was only stopped by statute in the reign of Edward III.:—

Ore court en Engleterre de anno in annum
Le quinzeme dener pur fere sic commune dampnum
E fet avaler que soleyent sedere super scamnum,
E vendre fet commune gent vaccas, vas, et pannum.
    Non placet ad summum quindenum sic dare nummum.

Une chose est contre foy, unde gens gravatur,
Que la meyté ne vient al roy, in regno quod levatur,
Pur ce qu'il n'ad tot l'enter, prout sibi datur,
Le peuple doit le plus doner, et sic sincopatur.
    Nam quæ taxantur, regi non omnia dantur.

Unquore plus greve à simple gent collectio lanarum,
Que vendre fet communement divitias earum;
Ne puet estre que tiel conseil constat Deo carum
Issi destruire le poverail pondus per amarum.
    Non est lex sana quod regi sit mea lana.

Uncore est plus outre peis, ut testantur gentes,
En le sac deus pers ou treis, per vim retinentes.
A qui remeindra cele legne? quidam respondentes,
Que ja n'avera roy ne regne, sed tantum colligentes.
    Pondus lanarum tam falsum constat amarum.

Depus que le roy vodera tam multum cepisse
Entre les riches si purra satis invenisse,
E plus à ce que m'est avys et melius fecisse
Des grant partie aver pris, et parvis pepercisse.
    Qui capit argentum sine causâ peccat egentum.[2]

[1] Compare analysis of *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, on p. 210.

[2] Now runs in England from year to year the tax of the fifteenth penny to do such general harm, and sinks to a low level those who used to sit upon the bench, and makes the common people sell their cows, and vessels, and clothes. It is not pleasant thus to pay money up to the last fifteenth. One

En radicem tangimus perturbationis
Regni de quo scribimus, et dissentionis
Partium quæ prælium dictum commiserunt.
Ad diversa studium suum converterunt.
Rex cum suis voluit ita liber esse
Et sic esse debuit, fuitque necesse,
Aut esse desinent rex, privatus jure
Regis, nisi faceret quidquid vellet; curæ
Non esse magnatibus regni quos proferret
Suis comitatibus, vel quibus conferret
Castrorum custodiam, vel quem exhibere
Populo justitiam vellet, et habere
Regni cancellarium thesaurariumque.
Suum ad arbitrium voluit quemcumque,
Et consiliarios de quacunque gente,
Et ministros varios se præcipiente,
Non intromittentibus se de factis regis
Angliæ baronibus, vim habente legis
Principis imperio, et quod imperaret
Suomet arbitrio singulos ligaret;
Nam et comes quilibet sic est compos sui,
Dum suorum quidlibet quantum vult et cui
Castra, terras, redditus, cui vult committit,
Et quamvis sit subditus rex totum permittit.
Quod si bene fecerit, prodest facienti,
Si non ipse viderit, sibimet nocenti
Rex non adversabitur. Cur conditionis
Pejoris efficitur princeps, si baronis
Militis et liberi res ita tractantur?[1]

[1] Lo! we touch the root of the disturbance of the kingdom whereof we write, and of the strife of the parties who have joined battle Each aimed at different objects. The king and his side wished to be free after this manner, and said that he ought and must, or that he would cease to be a king, if [illegible] would have whom he would at his will, and counsellors of any nation, and his various ministers according to his discretion, without any interference of the barons of England in the affairs of the kingdom, since the king's command has the force of law, and all that he pleases to order is binding on each of his subjects. For even an earl is so master, each in his own territory, giving of his own whatever, and how much he will, and committing to whom he will castles, lands, revenues, and, subject though he be, the king trusts every thing to his hands. If he does this well, so much the better for him; if not, let him see to it himself; the king will not oppose his injuring himself Why is a prince to be worse off, when the affairs of a baron, a knight, nay, of a freeman, are thus managed?—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 96. It will be observed that this is precisely the principle of feudal independence which is recognised in the code of St. Louis.

of their own prowess, and the national pride was heightened by the knowledge of the great part the Saxon bowmen had played in the battles of Crecy and Poitiers. As a mirror of this feeling, some interest may still be found in the poetry of Laurence Minot (1333-1352), though it is otherwise devoid of merit, being in point of diction and metre no more than a variation of the class of romances satirised in Chaucer's "Sir Thopas." A generation earlier Minot would have told interminable tales of Guy of Warwick or Sir Gawain, but now he takes for his subject the adventures of "Sir Edward" in his wars with "Sir Philip" and "Sir John." He recites the great deeds done by the king at Crecy, Tournay, and Calais. He finds in his victories the fulfilment of Merlin's prophecies, and constantly speaks of Edward under the figure of "the boar."[1] Had he recited in the reign of Edward II., it would have mattered little to him whether the legendary hero whom he might choose to celebrate were of English, French, or Danish birth; but now it is England against the world: the Scot has to be told that the defeat of Bannockburn is wiped out by the victory of Halidon Hill, or Neville's Cross; and the Frenchman is addressed in a tone of savage mockery—

> Quite ertou, that well we knaw,
>   Of catel, and of drewriss dere;
> Tharfore lies the hert ful law
>   That are was blithe als bird on brere.
>   Inglis men sall ȝit to ȝere
> Knok thi palet or thou pas,
>   And mak the polled like a frere
> And ȝit es Ingland als it was.[2]

When we speak of the effects of the early Renaissance on English poetry, it must therefore be understood that

[1] Merlin said thus with his mowth,
Out of the north into the sowth
Suld cum a bare over the se.
Minot, *Poems* (Hall's edition), p. 21.

[2] Thou art deprived, we well know, of chattels, and of dear delights; therefore thy heart, once blithe as bird on briar, lies full low. Englishmen shall still this year knock thy head ere thou go by, and make thee shaven as a friar; and yet England is as it was.—*Ibid.* p. 2.

Having thus stated the argument of the king's party, he turns to the other side:—

Sed nunc ad oppositum calamus vertatur,
Baronum propositum dictis subjungatur,
Et auditis partibus dicta conferantur
Atque certis finibus collata claudantur,
Ut quæ pars sit verior valeat liquere:
Veriori pronior populus parere.[1]

The following lines, taken out of a long pleading, may be regarded as summing up the case for the barons:—

Igitur communitas regni consulatur,
Et quid universitas sentiat sciatur
Cui leges propriæ maxime sunt notæ;
Nec cuncti provinciæ sic sunt idiotæ,
Quin sciant plus cæteris regni sui mores
Quos relinquunt posteris hi qui sunt priores.
Qui reguntur legibus magis ipsas sciunt,
Quorum sunt in usibus plus periti fiunt,
Et quia res agitur sua plus curabunt,
Et quo pax adquiritur sibi procurabunt.[2]

When a political idea of this kind—expressed, it is true, in mongrel and scholastic verse—can be put forward, it is plain that a nation, whatever its internal dissensions may be, must have attained a clear sense of its own life and unity. From the consciousness of freedom to the pride of patriotism is but a step. It is therefore not surprising, in the first half of Edward III.'s reign, to find the songs and satires against the great replaced by others expressive of national exultation. In the brilliant exploits of the king and his son the English people saw a reflection

[1] But now let the pen turn to the opposite side, and let the case of the barons be added to what has been said; and when the parties have been heard, let their words be compared, and a conclusion be arrived at from the premises, so that the truer side may prevail: the people is always more inclined to obey the truer view.—Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 98.

[2] Therefore let the commons of the kingdom be consulted; and let it be known what is the general feeling of those who best know their own laws; nor are all those of the country so inexperienced as not to know better than others the customs of their own kingdom, which are handed down from father to son. Those who are governed by the laws know most about them: those who use them are most skilled in them, and because their own business is at stake will take most care about it, and will consider for themselves what makes for their peace.—*Ibid.* p. 110.

of their own prowess, and the national pride was heightened by the knowledge of the great part the Saxon bowmen had played in the battles of Crecy and Poitiers. As a mirror of this feeling, some interest may still be found in the poetry of Laurence Minot (1333-1352), though it is otherwise devoid of merit, being in point of diction and metre no more than a variation of the class of romances satirised in Chaucer's "Sir Thopas." A generation earlier Minot would have told interminable tales of Guy of Warwick or Sir Gawain, but now he takes for his subject the adventures of "Sir Edward" in his wars with "Sir Philip" and "Sir John." He recites the great deeds done by the king at Crecy, Tournay, and Calais. He finds in his victories the fulfilment of Merlin's prophecies, and constantly speaks of Edward under the figure of "the boar."[1] Had he recited in the reign of Edward II., it would have mattered little to him whether the legendary hero whom he might choose to celebrate were of English, French, or Danish birth; but now it is England against the world: the Scot has to be told that the defeat of Bannockburn is wiped out by the victory of Halidon Hill, or Neville's Cross; and the Frenchman is addressed in a tone of savage mockery—

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the word is used in a special and limited sense, signifying the reappearance of the spirit of political liberty in a more distinct and definite form than had been witnessed since the days of the Greek and Roman republics. Rude and imperfect as is the vehicle of expression, the popular songs of England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries reveal a consciousness of united purpose and corporate pride in the nation, for which no contemporary parallel can be found in any other country of Europe, and which arises from political conditions of the kind that gave birth to the oratory of Pericles and Cicero. The time had not yet come for England when the masterpieces of ancient literature could exercise a refining influence on the efforts of her native genius. In this respect her early writers lag behind those of France and Italy. Here and there traces may be observed in the Latin songs of an appreciative study of the classics,[1] and of a revolt of the practical English mind against the futilities of the later scholastic logic.[2] But there is no sign of a reverence for the authority of the ancient philosophers; no attempt to utilise the resources of pagan mythology, like that which we encounter in almost every page of the *Divine Comedy* or the *Romance of the Rose*. These features do not appear in English poetry till the time of Chaucer, and in him they are the fruits rather of the imitation of Boccaccio and John de Meung, than of the direct influence of classical literature. What is really "classical," in this embryonic English art, is a certain direct manner of looking on Nature, Man, and Society,

[1] A song on the Scottish wars is written in rhyming stanzas, the last verse of which is an hexameter, as often as not quoted from a standard Latin author. For example :—

> Invido nil nequius nullus est qui nescit ;
> Nam de bono proximi dolor ejus crescit :
> Unde justus proficit hinc ipse tabescit,
> Sincerum nisi vas quodcunque infundis acescit.
>
> Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 161.

[2] A song against the scholastic studies depreciates Logic in comparison with Law and Medicine—

> Naturæ cognoscere si velis arcana,
> Stude circa physicam quæ dat membra sana :
> Sat quidquid expostulat egestas humana,
> Sat Galienis opes et sancti Justiniani.
>
> *Ibid.* p. 210.

the result of political as opposed to scholastic education, a compounded view of the relations of Church and State, emerging from the conflict of opposite extremes. The foundations thus formed showed themselves capable in after ages, as Burke says, of admitting all the improvements of art and refinement, and gave scope for that admirable variety of poetical architecture exemplified in the work of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, and Pope, which is the characteristic glory of English literature.

CHAPTER VI

LANGLAND

IN certain aspects of his genius the author of *The Vision concerning Piers Plowman* may be regarded as the Nævius of English poetry. He bears an obvious resemblance to Nævius in his literary aims. As the Latin poet sought to maintain the use of the Saturnian measure against the invasion of Greek models, prophesying that after his death the Camenæ would bewail him as the last to speak the Latin tongue, so Langland strove deliberately to revive the alliterative verse of his Saxon ancestors, which most of his contemporaries had set aside in favour of French rhyme. He resembles Nævius also in his imaginative conservatism. Religious rites, family traditions, the customs of the soil, the institutions of the State, took no stronger hold on the mind of the Roman, than the schooling of the English Church, preserved through so many generations of monastic life, on the genius of the visionary of the Malvern Hills. In Langland's poem are combined Cædmon's reverence for the text of Scripture, Cynewulf's love of riddles, Richard of Hampole's spiritual theology, Robert of Brunne's practical common sense, all blended with that spirit of allegorical interpretation which had moulded the system of ecclesiastical training since the days of Gregory the Great.

Here, however, the parallel ends. Nævius in Latin literature was the champion of a dwindling and decaying cause. No individual force—and the genius of Nævius

was not inconsiderable — could have made the meagre forms of native Latin art an adequate instrument of expression for the greatness of the Roman spirit. But *The Vision of Piers the Plowman*, in spite of its archaic style, is a classic work in English literature. From the moment of its first appearance it made a deep impression on the national imagination, and one generation of English writers after another has testified to its undiminished influence. A tribute to its power, direct or indirect, is paid in the pages of Chaucer, of Gascoigne, of Spenser, of Shakespeare, of Drayton, of Milton, of Bunyan; nor is this long-sustained influence difficult to explain, for not only does the poem "show the very age and body of the time his form and pressure," but it furnishes an abstract of one side of our national history. While Chaucer by his art has left an imperishable image of social life in the fourteenth century, Langland's vigorous satire, vivid powers of description, strong sense of justice, so faithfully reflect the conscience of the English people, that his *Vision* often seems to be projecting its light upon the ethical problems of our own day.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the two great principles on which society in the Middle Ages rested, Catholicism and Chivalry, reached their grand climacteric, and sank into rapid decay. The steady exertion of spiritual authority by Innocent III. over temporal sovereigns was exchanged for the spasmodic violence of Boniface VIII.; and, by the removal of the Papal court from Rome to Avignon, the sovereignty of the Catholic Church was deprived of much of its historical prestige. Shorn of its moral influence, the germs of corruption inherent in the system spread with fearful swiftness, and the sin of simony, manifested by the sale of pardons, indulgences, and benefices, established itself in the very heart of the Church. Thence the poison was diffused through every country in Europe, and particularly in England, where the policy of the Conqueror, by removing the bishops from the Hundred Courts, had tended to make the clergy the subjects'

of two sovereigns. On the one hand they insisted on their exemption from the ordinary law of the land, or at least that their offences should be judged in their own courts by men of their own order; on the other hand they were themselves exposed to injustice from the Pope's claim to fill vacant benefices with his nominees.

Nor was Catholicism affected only by the corruption of the Popes; the whole moral and intellectual machinery of the system was weakened by the deterioration of the mendicant orders, and by the decline of the Schoolmen. So long as the preaching friars observed the high standard of discipline imposed upon them by St. Dominic and St. Francis, the Pope could command the service of spiritual armies, whose ascetic piety impressed the minds of the common people in every country. But when this strict rule was relaxed, and the people frequently observed a startling contrast between the high professions and the lax practice of the friars, the reaction from reverential admiration was proportionately strong. For a time, too, the supremacy of the Pope was fortified by the great intellectual eminence of the Franciscan and Dominican doctors, who acquired a practical monopoly of the chairs in the universities of Paris and Oxford. Thomas Aquinas, by harmonising the authority of the Fathers with the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, had given to the Catholic system, of which the Pope was the exponent and the head, the appearance of impregnable logic, resting on a moral and metaphysical foundation. But in the hands of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham the great educational scheme, the ethical and spiritual aspect of which, in the works of the elder Schoolmen, inspired the genius of Dante, was changed into a mere instrument of subtle dialectic, and was sometimes even used as an engine for undermining the theory of Papal supremacy. From these unprofitable studies energetic minds turned to the more remunerative schools of Law and Medicine, or to imaginative research in the sphere of alchemy and astrology.

Chivalry had not less seriously declined from its high ideal. By its generous recognition of the social tie existing between the powerful and the feeble, by its close alliance with religion, and, above all, by the devotional feeling inspired in the Crusades, the true conception of knighthood had enshrined itself in the affections of the people. Long after the symbolism associated with the order had ceased to have any practical meaning, the poets continued to present the image as the type of all that was noble and exalted. They recalled the girding of the sword of righteousness on the thigh, and the bathing of the body of the new-made knight in token of purification from forbidden actions.[1] They personified knighthood, symbolising doubtless the great council of vassals, as the chief adviser of the king.[2] The purpose of the institution they conceived to be, at home the maintenance of order and justice, and abroad the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre. These various aims and aspirations had indeed been part of the necessary code of chivalry, so long as justice was mainly administered in the manorial courts, and while Europe was united in the prosecution of the Crusades. But as the several European states began to form separate conceptions of their respective interests, as the central authority of the king established itself in the sphere of law and justice, and as the ardour of religious enthusiasm cooled, the moral and political functions of knighthood were gradually curtailed, and its activity was confined within a sphere in which the petty tyrannies springing out of its privileges were often more conspicuous than its virtues. Even during the reign of Edward I. in England the lustre of the character of that great and knightly king was insufficient to reconcile his poorer subjects to the burdens under which they

[1] Accingatur gladio super femur miles,
Abit dissolutio, abiunt actus viles,
Corpus novi militis solet balneari
Ut a factis vetitis discat emundari.

Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 167.

[2] *Piers Plowman*, "Thanne cam a kyng · knighthode hym ladde"

groaned.[1] The "evil times" of his son, with the disgraceful defeat of Bannockburn, and the perpetual dissensions of the nobility, went far to destroy the feeling of the people in favour of the institution of chivalry.[2] But in the reign of Edward III. a reaction set in. The energetic character and military skill of the king, largely employed as it seemed in defence of the common interest, dazzled the eyes of a nation rapidly increasing in wealth and prosperity, and becoming daily more sensible of its important position in the economy of Europe. Knight and yeoman had an equal share in the glory of Crecy and Poitiers; so that during the first half of the king's long reign the people pleased themselves with the illusion of reviving knighthood.

The illusion was intensified by the extraordinary splendour with which the luxury of the times disguised the internal decay of the institution. Edward III. restored the Round Table, and tournaments were the chief amusement of his court. Crowded with knights blazing in steel armour, their shields impaled with the various heraldic colours, their close-fitting overcoats embroidered with armorial bearings which were repeated even on the caparison of their horses, these gatherings presented a marvellous show of brilliant pageantry.[3] From the tilting field luxury of apparel passed into ordinary domestic life. Law after law was passed in Edward III.'s time in the hope of restraining it, but in vain, and the fashion reached its height under Richard II. That king is said by Holinshed[4] to have "had one

[1] See Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 182. [2] *Ibid.* pp. 258, 262, 323.

[3] The writers of the metrical romances are never wearied in their recital of the minutest details of their heroes' attire. Hence Chaucer, wishing to ridicule them, is equally particular in his account of Sir Thopas—

He did next his white lere
Of cloth of lake fine and clere,
A breche and eke a shirt,
And next his shirt an hakiton,
And over that an habergeon
For piercing of his heart;

And over that a fine hauberk
Was all wrought of jewes work,
Full strong it was of plate;
And over that his cote-armure
As white as is the lily flure,
In which he wolde debate.

[4] Cited in Fairholt, *Costume in England*, p. 134, note 3.

The recollections of the teaching of Arnold of Brescia, combined with the doctrines of the Fraticelli, bore practical fruit in Rome, where for a moment the rule of Orsini and Colonna was suppressed by the tribune Rienzi. Curiously, but characteristically, no French poet seems to have raised his voice against the intolerable exactions and exaggerated luxury which, in France as in England, attended the decay of feudalism. The savage satire of John de Meung was followed by an ominous silence; on the other hand the mantle of the sentimental William de Lorris fell to a worthy successor in the person of William de Machault, of whom more must be said hereafter. Machault's followers continued the trickling stream of conventional love-poetry through the Hundred Years' War with England. The artificial nature of their inspiration is the more apparent, in view of the real forces which were at work in French society, as manifested both in the extraordinary revivalism of the Flagellants and in the brute uprising of the Jacquerie.

In England the reaction against Papalism and Feudalism led to more positive political results. For the first twenty years of Edward III.'s long reign the tide of victory and prosperity flowed smoothly on. But in 1348 England, in common with all other European countries, was exposed to the terrible ravages of the Black Death, which is said to have swept away half the population. When war was renewed with France the hitherto unvarying good fortune of the English seemed to have deserted them, and their army, in the act of besieging Paris, was assailed by a storm of rain and hail so terrible that Edward, as he witnessed the sufferings of his soldiers, rising in his stirrups, vowed to God to bring the war to an end, a vow which was accomplished in the Peace of Bretigny in 1360. Another visitation of the Black Death followed in 1361-62, and while it was still raging, a tempest of unequalled violence passed over the land, tearing up great trees by the roots, and levelling the tower of Norwich Cathedral. To reflective minds this succession of calamities appeared as the manifest judg-

ments of God to punish the pride of the people.[1] A spirit of humiliation and repentance, not confined as in France to extravagant sects like the Flagellants, but widely spread through society, took the place of national elation, and men began to contrast in themselves, as well as in others, the difference between their profession and their practice. The name of John Wycliffe now first appears; but some years before that reformer had developed his peculiar opinions, the deeper religious sense of the time embodied itself in the remarkable poem called *The Vision of Piers the Plowman.*

Of the personal history of the author of this poem nothing is known with certainty. The Christian name, which he assigns in the title of his poem to the seer of the *Vision*, is William, shortened in the text to "Wille," and two or three touches seem intended to be of the nature of a portrait. Thus he alludes to the tallness of his stature,[2] and his brusque and independent manners;[3] while from one curious passage, evidently autobiographical, we gather that for some time he lived in Cornhill and followed the fashions of the Lollards.[4] It is plain from the character of his work that he must have received a clerical education, and if not himself one of the regular clergy, was at least thoroughly acquainted with the habits of the monastic orders.[5] Professor Skeat, the eminent editor of

[1] And thanne saw I moche more · than I before tolde,
For I say (saw) the felde ful of folke · that I before of seyde,
And how resoun gan arrayen hym · alle the reume (realm) to preche,
And with a crosse afor the kynge · comsed (commenced) thus to techen
He preved that these pestilences · were for pure synne,
And the southwest wynde · on Saterday at euene
Was pertliche (plainly) for pure pryde · and for no poynt elles.
Vision of Piers the Plowman, Passus v 9-15

[2] He describes his own inward nature, or Thought, as resembling his outward man—

A moche (tall) man, as me thoughte · and lyke to my selve
Come and called me · by my kynde (own) name.

[3] And some lakked (blamed) my lyf · allowed it fewe (few praised it),
And leten me for a lorel (held me as a worthless fellow) and loth to reverence
Lordes or ladyes.

[4] Compare *Vision*, Passus vi. (C) 1-108.

[5] For if hevene be on this erthe and ese to any soule
It is in cloister or in scole · by many skilles (arguments) I fynde

his works, considers that there is evidence of his being a married man; and M. Jusserand, whose ingenious monograph on the *Vision* will be read with pleasure by all students, infers from his expressions that he was the son of a bondman. I confess that my own faith in these two supposed facts is weak;[1] but, on the other hand, there seems to be no reason why we should not accept the fairly good external evidence which assigns the authorship of the poem to William Langland, and makes him the son of one Stacy de Rokayle, while, from the poet's special reference to the Malvern Hills, it may be gathered that he was born in one of the Western Midland counties.[2] Nor do I think it at all unlikely that, as M. Jusserand and Professor Skeat suggest, he has left in his poem an anagrammatical clue to his own identity in the line—

"I have lyved in *londe*," quod I, "my name is *longe Wille*."

But however much the reader may regret that the personal records of a writer so remarkable should be so meagre and obscure, no one who has studied his work in itself can doubt that he was a man of profound religious conviction; that, by force of character and intellect, he was qualified to form a right judgment of man and society; that experience had acquainted him with the minutest details of the life which he described; and that—making allowance for the archaic vehicle of expression he adopted—he possessed all the genius, insight, and literary skill necessary to present his poetical conceptions in an artistic form.

[1] Professor Skeat relies on the line—

And called Kitte, my wyf · and Kalote, my doughter;

but it appears to me that these two names, inserted for the sake of alliteration, are no more likely to be those of real persons than "Daw, the dykere," or "Betoun, the brewster." M. Jusserand points to the phrase used by Holy Church in addressing the dreamer, "I received thee at the first and made thee a freeman;" but I think with Professor Skeat that these words probably refer only to the spiritual freedom given by the sacrament of baptism.

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Thereupon it seemed to the dreamer that all the human figures disappeared from his vision, and a rout of rats and small mice rushed upon the scene, deliberating on the measures to be taken with the cat. A rat proposed that their enemy should be killed, but a mouse, "striding sternly forth," pointed out that, even if the cat were killed, another would come in its place. "I have heard my father say," continued the mouse, "that where the cat is a kitten, wretched is the court, and as the book of Ecclesiastes says, 'Væ terræ ubi puer rex est.' Better is a little loss than a long sorrow for most of us, though we get rid of a tyrant, for we mice should destroy many men's malt, and you rabble of rats would rend men's clothes, if there were no cat of the court to leap upon you; for if you rats had your will you could not rule yourselves. For my part I say that I see so much evil to come, that, by my counsel, neither cat nor kitten shall be harmed, and I will never pay my share of the collar." After this apologue, so vividly illustrative alike of the political situation and the character of the poet, and so prophetic of the approaching calamities of the kingdom, the dreamer resumes the vision of humanity, and closes his prologue with a view of the avarice of the lawyers, and the idleness and ill-living of the labouring classes

Having exhibited his *dramatis personæ*, the dreamer proceeds to explain the meaning of his vision. A lovely lady descends from a castle, and shows him that the tower he had seen was Truth, the abode of God the Father. God gives all men enough, and the only three things really needful for them are clothes, meat, and drink. We are not to follow the instincts of the flesh, for that is under the influence of a lying spirit, but are to obey the rule of reason and common sense. The lady further shows him that the dungeon in the deep dale was the Castle of Care, the dwelling of the Father of Falsehood, who hinders Love and deceives all that trust in treasure. Then the dreamer asks the lady's name. "I," said she, "am Holy Church, who held thee at thy baptism, and taught thee thy creed, and thou gavest me pledges to

Between them was a fair field full of folk, each and all engaged in some line of action, of which the peculiarity was, that, in almost every case, it had diverged from its true purpose. Some indeed were industriously employed in ploughing and sowing, but only that their idle companions might waste the fruits of their labours. There were a few harmless minstrels, bent on making an honest livelihood, but most of this profession resembled the ribald story-tellers, whose loose tales in earlier times had provoked the indignation of Robert of Brunne and the author of *Cursor Mundi.* Pilgrims and palmers were journeying to the shrine of St. James of Compostella, that they might have the privilege of lying for the rest of their lives. Here and there a pious hermit was dwelling quietly in his retreat, but others were roaming about the country with companions by no means in keeping with the garb of sanctity. Friars of all the four orders were interpreting the text of Scripture in a sense agreeable to the low desires of their audience. A pardoner was proclaiming his commission from the Pope to give absolution, at a proper price, for breach of vows and fasts, and was sharing with the parish priest the money which should have gone to the poor. Bishops were devoting their energies to the secular work of the State instead of to the service of religion. The rule of the Church was given over to the cardinals at the Papal court, rather than to those to whom St. Peter had left it, the Cardinal Virtues. Then the dreamer beheld a king, led by knighthood, and acclaimed by the voice of the commons, who appointed ploughmen to provide the sustenance of the realm, while the rulers took thought for law and order. A lunatic kneeled before the king, praying that he might govern well; and then, as if at a coronation, Conscience (or, as it is in some versions, an angel) proclaimed with a loud voice, but in the Latin tongue, so that the unlearned might not dispute on the matter, a number of maxims on good government; while the commons replied in Latin verse, which few of them could construe: "Precepta regis sunt nobis vincula legis."

execution of the hateful privilege of Purveyance. The first to bring Mede from her bower is Favel the flatterer, a broker of the class which in those days was employed in arranging treaties of marriage; and when the parties are ready, Liar produces a charter, whereby the various goods and possessions of Mede are granted to Falsehood. At the sight of these monstrous proceedings Theology waxes wroth, insisting that Mede ought to be married to Truth, and that before the marriage is consummated the parties must proceed to Westminster, to see whether the law will permit it. Simony and Civil assent to the proposal, but Favel prepares the way with florins, which he takes care to distribute to the scribes. Then follows a passage of remarkable humour and power, which seems to condense into a few lines all the complaints of the injustice of the times scattered through the political songs of the preceding reigns.—

> Ac thanne cared thei for caplus · to kairen hem thider,[1]
> And Favel sette forth thanne · folus ynowe,[2]
> And sette Mede upon a schyreve · shodde al newe,[3]
> And Fals sat on a sisoure · that softlich trotted,
> And Favel on a flaterere · fetislich[4] atired.
> Tho haued notaries none[5] · annoyed thei were,
> For Symonye and Cyuile · shulde on hire fete gange.
> Ac thanne swore Symonye and Cyuile bothe,
> That sompnoures shulde be sadled · and serue hem uchone[6]
> And lat apparaille this prouisores · in palfreis wyse;[7]—
> "Sire Symony hymseluen · shal sitte upon here bakkes[8]
> Denes and suddenes[9] · draw yow togideres,
> Erchdekenes[10] and officiales · and alle yowre Registreres,
> Lat sadel hem with siluer · owre synne to suffre,

---

[1] But then provided they horses (caballos) to betake themselves thither.

[2] Foals enough.

[3] Set Mede on a sheriff newly shod.

[4] Handsomely.

[5] Then had the notaries none

[6] That summoners should be saddled and serve each of them.

[7] And let provisors be apparelled in the fashion of palfreys.—The provisors were clerks who had a provision made them by the Pope for succession to a benefice during the lifetime of the holder. The statute of *Provisores* was directed against the abuse.

[8] Compare this cavalcade with what is said in the poem on the evil times of Edward II. (Wright, *Political Songs*) —

> Coveityse upon his hors he wole be sone there
> And bringe the bishop silver, and rounen (whisper) in his ere.

[9] Sub-deans.

[10] Archdeacons.

As auoutrye and deuorses[1] · and derne[2] usurye,
To bere bischopes about · abrode in visitynge.
Paulynes pryues[3] · for pleyntes in the consistorie
Shall serue my-self · that Cyuile is nempned;[4]
And cartisadel the commissarie · owre carte shal he lede,
And fecchen us vytailles · at *fornicatores*.[5]
And maketh of lyer a long carte[6] · to lede alle these othere,
As Freres and faitoures[7] · that on here fete rennen."
And thus Fals and Fauel · fareth forth togideres,
And Mede in the myddes · and alle thise men after.

Soothness (Truth), however, marks the company on the road, and without saying anything pushes on and enables Conscience to give the king warning of their approach. The king, enraged at the news, declares that if he could catch Falsehood and Favel he would hang them both. Dread, hearing his exclamation at the door, conveys a friendly warning to Falsehood and his followers, who scatter in confusion. Guile is sheltered by tradesmen, and Liar, after being forced for a long time to lurk in by-lanes, is taken in, washed, clothed, and entertained by Pardoners, and afterwards by Friars.

Mede, who has thus been left alone, is brought before the king in his chamber at Westminster, and the latter expresses his intention of forgiving her if she conforms to his wishes. The justices and clerks go to wait upon her with many offers of assistance, and on promising to glaze a window in the monastery, she is duly absolved of her sins by a confessor in the garb of a friar. She is then courteously asked by the king whether she is prepared to amend her ways and to wed Conscience, one of his knights. As she declares her willingness to do so, Conscience is called by the king, and asked whether he will take her to wife. He flatly refuses, and sets forth Mede's whole manner of life; how she releases the guilty, throws the just into prison, and hangs the inno-

[1] Adultery and divorces.
[2] Secret.
[3] Confidential men of the Paulines—*i.e.* the Crutched Friars.
[4] Whose name is Civil.
[5] Harness the Commissary (Judge in the place of the Bishop); he shall draw our cart and provide food for us at the expense of adulterers—referring to the practice of exacting fines for sins from rich people.
[6] Make of Liar a long cart.
[7] Impostors.

cent; how she gets absolution when she pleases; how, as the *provisors* show, she is privy with the Pope; how she lets priests live in concubinage, corrupts the judges, and makes it difficult for the poor to get justice, in consequence of the law's delays. Mede, being called upon for her defence against these charges, makes, it must be admitted, an extremely able speech. Beginning with an invective against Conscience, whom she accuses of cowardice in persuading the king to the Treaty of Bretigny, she goes on to show how necessary the intervention of Mede is in all the relations of life, between master and servant, king and subject, priest and people, buyer and seller; indeed, so powerful is her argument, that she persuades the king she is well worthy to rule. Conscience, however, has not studied logic in the schools for nothing, and proves himself quite a match for Mede, whose fallacies he exposes point by point. There are, he shows, two kinds of Mede, one the just reward for service, the other the price of misdoing. What labourers receive is not Mede, but wages; in merchandise there is no Mede, but exchange; priests no doubt must be maintained, but those who take money for masses look for their Mede in this world. As for kings, we see the mischief that Mede did to Saul when he made war on Amalek. The teller of truth, says Conscience, is now the first to be blamed; but it shall not always be so, and he winds up his argument with a fine vision of the Golden Age, resembling the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil and the Messianic prophecies in Isaiah :—

"I, Conscience, knowe this · for kynde witt[1] me it taughte,
That resoun shall regne · and rewmes governe,[2]
And righte as Agag hadde · happe shal somme.[3]
Samuel shal sleen hym · and Saul shal be blamed,
And Dauid shall be diademed · and daunten hem alle,
And one Cristen kynge · kepen hem alle.
Shal na more Mede · be maistre, as she is nouthe,[4]
Ac loue and lowenesse · and lewte[5] togederes,
Thise shal be maisteres on mold[6] · treuthe to saue.

[1] Common sense.
[2] And govern kingdoms.
[3] And some shall fare just as Agag did.
[4] Now
[5] Loyalty.
[6] On the earth.

And whoso trespasseth ayein treuthe · or taketh ayein his wille,
Leute shall don hym lawe · and no lyf elles.[1]
Shal no seriaunt[2] for her seruyse · were a silke howue,
Ne no pelure[3] in his cloke · for pledyng atte barre.
Mede of mys-doeres · makyth many lordes,
And ouer lordes lawes · reuleth the rewmes.[4]
Ac kynde loue[5] shal come yit · and Conscience togideres,
And make of lawe a laborere · suche loue shal arise,
And such a pees amonge the peple · and a perfit trewthe,
That jewes shal wene in here witte · and waxen wonder glade,
That Moises or Messie · be come into this erthe,
And have wonder in here hertis · that men beth so trewe.
Alle that bereth baslarde[6] · brode swerd or launce,
Axe other[7] hachet · or eny wepne ellis,
Shal be demed to the deth · but if he do it smethye[8]
In-to sikal or to sithe · to schare or to kulter;[9]
Conflabunt gladios suos in vomeres etc.
Eche man to pleye with a plow · pykoys[10] or spade,
Spynne or sprede donge · or spille hym-self with sleuthe."[11]

Mede has now no argument left but misquotation of Scripture. Solomon, says she, declares in the Book of Wisdom that they that give gifts win the victory and obtain honour—*Honorem adquirit qui munera dat.* But Conscience, whose memory is as good as his logic, at once reminds her that she has left out the last part of the text—*Animam autem aufert accipientium:* "He that giveth a gift shall have honour, but the soul of them that receive it is bound thereby."

Although Conscience would seem to have fairly worsted Mede in argument, yet the king is still apparently unconvinced. He bids the parties be reconciled. Conscience, who represents the right disposition of the heart, rather than Philosophy, declines to submit unless Reason assents, whereupon the king commands him to fetch this councillor to court. Reason, when summoned by Conscience, bids his man Cato[12]

1 Loyalty shall judge him and no other creature.
2 Serjeant at law.
3 Silk hood; nor fur.
4 Mede makes many misdoers into lords, and rules the kingdom, superseding the law of the lord.
5 Natural love.
6 Dagger.
7 Or.
8 Unless he beat it at the smithy.
9 Ploughshare or coulter.
10 Pickaxe.
11 Or ruin himself with sloth.
12 An allusion to the *Disticha de Moribus* of Dionysius Cato, a book of the highest authority in the Middle Ages.

saddle his horse Suffer-till-I-see-my-time, on which he sets out for court with his friend. On the way they observe riding behind them two men of law, Garyn (Wary) Wisdom, a character resembling Bunyan's Worldly-Wiseman, and Witty or Policy, who are riding post-haste to the king, lest Reason should get an advantage over them. Arrived at court Reason is graciously received by the king, who places him between himself and his son, and a scene follows which is evidently intended to paint the actual corruptions of justice, as the preceding Passus had been devoted to the exposure of the unjust motives which sway men's hearts. Peace comes into court and presents a bill, one of those petitions by which the commons, in the infancy of Parliament, were accustomed to obtain remedies for grievances. The bill is put forth against Wrong, and illustrates the evils caused by the privilege of Purveyance—

> "Both my gees and my grys · his gadelynges feccheth;[1]
> I dar nought for fere of hym · fyghte ne chyde.
> He borwed of me Bayard · he broughte hym home neuere,[2]
> Ne no ferthyng ther-fore · for naughte I couthe plede.
> He meyneteneth his men · to morther myne hewen,[3]
> Forestalleth my feyres · and fighteth in my chepynge;[4]
> And breketh up my bernes dore · and bereth aweye my whete,
> And taketh me but a taile[5] · for ten quarters of otes."

Wrong, alarmed at this accusation, secures the services of Wary Wisdom and Witty, who take Mede with them, but the king orders Wrong to be put into irons, and refuses to listen to the two men of law when they suggest that the accused should be bailed. Peace, the petitioner, is then pressed by Mede to be content with money compensation, and would have consented, had not the king shown himself inexorable. Reason's interest being asked for on behalf of the prisoner—

1 [illegible]
2 [illegible]
3 [illegible]
4 [illegible] .—The forestallers bought up commodities for the purpose of raising prices.
5 He gives me nothing but a tally.—The old sign of a contract to pay. Tallies are still used in English hop-gardens at the time of picking

"Rede[1] me noughte," quod Resoun, "no reuthe to have,
Till lordes and ladies · lovien alle treuthe,
And haten al harlotrye · to heren it or to mouthen it;
Tyl Pernelle's purfil · be put in here hucche;[2]
And children's cherissyng · be chastyng with yerdes;[3]
And harlotes holynesse · be holden for an hyne;[4]
Till clerken coueitise be · to clothe the pore and to fede,
And religious romares · *recordare* in here cloisteres,[5]
As Seynt Benet hem bad · Bernarde and Fraunceys;
And tyl prechoures prechyng · be preved on hemseluen;
Tyl the kynges conseille · be the comune profyte;
Tyl Bisschopes' Baiardes · ben beggares chambres,[6]
Here haukes and her houndes · helpe to pore Religious," etc.

Until this reformation is accomplished, says Reason, there should be no pity, and no wrong in this world should go unpunished, or be atoned for by gifts. At this Wary Wisdom winked at Mede,

And seide, "Madame, I am yowre man · what so my mouth jangleth
I falle in floreines," quod that freke · "an faile speche ofte."[7]

All good men, however, thought that Reason was right, and the king, being of the same opinion, rebuked his lawyers, declaring that all injustice should be punished. Conscience doubts that it will be hard to govern thus; but Reason, on the contrary, declares it will be easy, if the king be obedient to his rules, and Conscience be of the council.

"And I graunt," quod the kynge · "goddes forbode it faile,
Als long as owre lyf lasteth · lyue we togideres."

Here ends that part of the *Vision* which is more particularly directed to the exposure of the corruptions

[1] Advise.

[2] Till Purnell's fur be put away in her box.—The statutes against over-dressing were strict.

[3] And children's spoiling be turned to chastening with rods.

[4] And the supposed high-breeding of ribalds be esteemed as that of a hind.

[5] And religious ramblers say mass in their cloister.—"*Recordare* is the first word in a mass for avoiding sudden death, the recital of which secured to the hearers two hundred days of indulgence."—Skeat.

[6] Till bishops' horses become beggars' chambers—*i.e.* till the money spent on horses be devoted to the poor.

[7] "Whatever arguments I use with my mouth, I fall in with a florin," quoth the fellow, "and then my speech fails me."

of the State: what follows has reference to the sins of individuals. When the king and his knights, after the trial of Mede, went to the church to hear matins, the dreamer woke, but he soon fell asleep again, and imagined himself to be listening to the sermon of Reason, already alluded to,[1] in which the preacher pointed to the manifest judgments of God sent upon the nation, and exhorted all men everywhere to repent. Moved by his eloquence, the Seven Deadly Sins come to confession, and are described one by one in passages of extraordinary dramatic power, revealing to the fullest extent the poet's gifts of imagination, observation, and judgment. Pride and Lechery are very roughly sketched; but in the confession of Envy, Wrath, Avarice, Gluttony, and Sloth, these passions exhibit their effects, in rapid transformation, on every rank and condition of men,—mostly of the lower classes,—with whom the writer is best acquainted. Thus Envy confesses that he would sooner see his neighbour Gybbe have mischance than get a pound of Essex cheese, and that he had hired Backbiting as a broker to depreciate his fellow-tradesman's wares. Wrath has lived at one time as gardener, and at another as scullion, in a convent, and has set the whole society by the ears. Avarice has mastered all the tricks of every trade, from the time when he learned the art of lying and false weights at Weyhill and Winchester fairs, down to the time when he began to lend to lords and ladies, and to acquire manors, through his debtors being in arrear with their payment. He knows how to clip coin, and how to lend it in exchange for valuable pledges; and his wife Rose the regrater (retail dealer) is well skilled to give under-payment for the weight of cloth she buys, and to adulterate poor people's drink. Glutton, on his way to confession, is tempted into the public-house, where he drinks, in company with Cis the shoemaker's wife, Wat the Warrener, Tim the tinker, Hick the ostler, and other choice spirits, to such an extent that he has to be put

[1] See p. 207, note 1.

to bed by his wife, and needs all Saturday and Sunday to sleep off the effects of his debauch.

As each sin comes to the close of his confession, Repentance rebukes and admonishes him, and informs him what he must do to obtain mercy and absolution. Then Hope seizes a horn and blows it with *Beati quorum remissæ sunt iniquitates*, and a vast crowd of penitents throng together, hoping to find Truth. Meeting one in pilgrim's dress, they ask if he has ever heard tell of a saint named Truth; but though he has been to Sinai, and to Bethlehem, and Babylon, he can tell them nothing of that shrine. Suddenly a ploughman puts forth his head—

"I knowe him as kyndely · as clerk doth his bokes;
Conscience and kynde witt [1] · kenned me to his place,
And deden me suren hym sikerly [2] · to serue hym for euere,
Both to sowe and to sette · the while I swynke [3] mighte.
I have ben his folwar · al this fifty wyntre;
Both ysowen his sede · and sued [4] his bestes,
With-inne and with-outen · wayted his profyt.[5]
I dyke and I delue · I do that treuthe hoteth; [6]
Some tyme I sowe · and some tyme I thresche,
In tailours crafte and tynkares craft · what treuthe can devyse,
I weue and I wynde · and do what treuthe hoteth.
For thoughe I seye it my-self · I serue hym to paye;
I haue myn huire of hym wel · and otherwhiles more; [7]
He is the prestest payer [8] · that pore men knoweth;
He ne withalt non hewe his hyre · that he ne hath it at euen.[9]
He is as low as a lombe · and louelich of speche,[10]
And if ye wilneth to wite · where that he dwelleth,
I shal wisse yow wetterly [11] · the weye to his place."

All the pilgrims press round the ploughman, whose name is Piers, proffering him money, which he refuses; he gives them, however, very minute instructions how to find the road to the wicket gate leading into Paradise, which, says he, is kept by seven sisters, Abstinence, Humility, Charity, Chastity, Patience, Peace, and Bounty,

[1] Common sense.
[2] And made me plight my troth to him surely.
[3] Labour.
[4] Followed.
[5] Watched his profit.
[6] What truth bids.
[7] Sometimes more than my due.
[8] The quickest payer.
[9] He withholds from no labourer his hire so that he shall not get it at even.
[10] He is meek as a lamb and pleasant of speech.
[11] I shall teach you truly.

in other words the Seven Christian Virtues, the exact opposites of the Seven Deadly Sins. Some of the pilgrims, especially a cut-purse and an ape-ward, declare that they can have no kindred there; but Piers reminds them that Mercy (the Virgin Mary) dwells there also, through whom they may get grace.

Having thus given his view of the corruptions of the State, of the sins of men, and of the cure for both kinds of evils, the poet proceeds to consider the duties of the various constituent portions of society. The pilgrims declare that they shall never find their way without a guide; whereupon Piers professes his readiness to lead them as soon as he has ploughed his half acre. Meantime all are to occupy themselves with some useful business: ladies are to sew chasubles and to comfort the needy and naked; the knight is to preserve Church and State from the disorders caused by wicked men; the rest are to help Piers in his ploughing, and as their reward are promised the right of gleaning in harvest time. Piers then makes his will in preparation for his journey, and sets all his labourers to work. Now, however, great difficulties begin. At nine o'clock in the morning Piers, leaving his plough, goes out to see what his workmen are doing, and finds some in the ale-house drinking and singing, while others are feigning infirmity in order to avoid the necessity of labour. "I will soon find out," says Piers, "whether you are telling the truth: Truth shall teach you to drive his team." Anchorites and hermits shall have only one meal a day; and the run-about recluse shall have nothing. An idle Frenchman insolently refuses to do his bidding, and Piers appeals for protection to the knight, whose courteous intervention being of no avail, the ploughman summons Hunger to his assistance. Hunger seized on the rebel, and so buffeted him that he looked like a lantern for ever after; while the other idlers, dismayed at his fate, all rushed to do their work. Piers is filled with compassion for their distress, but fears that they will fall again into evil ways when Hunger has once departed. He therefore asks his

letters, purchased from the Pope, will avail them little hereafter.

Finally the poet concludes:—

For-thi I conseille alle cristene · to crye God mercy,
And Marie his moder · be owre mene betwene,[1]
Thet God gyue us grace here · ar we gone hennes,
Suche werkes to werche · while we ben here,
That after owre deth-day · Do-well reherce
At the day of dome · we did as he highte.[2]

Up to this point all has been perfectly clear, consistent, and intelligible, because the poet has been working according to a settled plan. The allegory relates to the moral life of men, and it is represented in a definite scheme of poetical action. But having reached his ethical conclusion, it seems to have occurred to Langland that he must found his system of morals on a metaphysical basis, and he accordingly embarked on a new poem which he called *Vita de Do-Well, Do-Bet, Do-Best.* To analyse this sequel in detail would be foreign to the design of our history, especially as the poet himself seems to have often wandered aimlessly in the mazes of his thought. It will be seen, however, that his work falls naturally into three divisions, in the first of which he appears to be defining for his readers what is the true theory of moral action. The visionary falls in with Thought and Wit, and learns from them that Do-Well dwells in a castle called Caro (the Flesh), together with the Lady Anima (the Soul), the Constable Inwit (Conscience), and his five sons (the Senses). But no use is made of this allegory in the action, which is almost entirely occupied with long interviews between William and such personages as Study, Clergy, and Scripture, with whom he holds much dispute, without however being far advanced towards the discovery of Do-Well. He has also a vision of Fortune, Nature, and Reason, which lets us see the influence exercised on the poet's thought by the *Romance of the Rose.* Imagination afterwards appears to him and rebukes him for his impatience; while, finally,

[1] Be our Mediator.

[2] As he commanded.

in company with Conscience and Patience, he falls in with one Activa Vita or Haukyn, the Active Man, whose coat —the only one in his possession—is covered with stains symbolical of the seven deadly sins. Haukyn, being duly instructed in his duties by Patience, repents, and bewails his sins; the noise wakes the dreamer and puts an end to this part of the vision.

The *Vita de Do-Bet* sets forth the spiritual life of the soul. The object of the dreamer is to discover the nature of Charity. He meets with Faith in the person of Abraham and Spes (Hope), who are in quest of Piers the Plowman, now become identical with Charity or Christ. A wounded man is discovered in the way; Faith and Hope pass by him; but the good Samaritan, or Piers Plowman, or Charity, binds up his wounds, leaving him to be attended at an inn called *Lex Christi*. Then follows a description of the jousting of Jesus, and his triumph over Death and Hell, the allegory being based on the text of the *Gospel of Nicodemus;* and with the news of Piers' victory, announced by the ringing of the Easter Bells, the dreamer is awaked and the second part of the *Vision* ends.

In the *Vita de Do-Best* the Saviour has departed from the earth, and henceforth Piers the Plowman typifies the life of the Christian Church. Christ's place is supplied by Grace, who makes Piers his ploughman, providing for his labour four oxen (the four Gospels), four "stottes" (bullocks or horses, the Four Evangelists), and four seeds (the cardinal virtues) Piers builds the House of Unity, but it is attacked by Pride, and in the concluding Passus of the poem Antichrist becomes master of the world. Conscience advises the world to come into the House of Unity; and Nature, hearing the address of Conscience, lets loose Disease upon mankind. Many perish. Eld bears Death's banner: Death strikes into the dust Popes and Kings: Eld attacks the poet himself Death draws nigh to him: he cries to Nature, who advises him to take refuge in Unity; but, coming thither, he finds it besieged by seven giants (the Deadly Sins) and Antichrist. Flattery

(a friar) treacherously gains admission into the castle, and Conscience declares that he will become a pilgrim and go forth to seek Piers Plowman. "And then," says the poet, "he cried aloud for Grace, and I awoke." Thus the poem concludes in gloom and defeat.

Nothing can illustrate more vividly the universality of the forces which, in the fourteenth century, were undermining the fabric of the mediæval European order, than the fundamental likeness between the *Divine Comedy* and the *Vision of Piers Plowman*. On a superficial view indeed many features in the two poems stand out in vivid contrast. Writing half a century after the death of Dante, there is nothing to show that Langland had read, or even heard of, the work of his great predecessor. That work, with its sharp, clear-cut, and precise forms, with its constant allusions to particular places, persons, and events, offers as clear a mirror of Italian city life, as the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, so crowded with scenes of generic painting, so free from individual names and details, affords of the semi-barbarous society of feudal England. No less striking is the contrast between the persons of the two poets: the Florentine, of noble birth, deeply versed in all the art and science of his age, experienced in civil affairs; master of a beautiful and harmonious form of verse; the Englishman, the descendant perhaps of small landowners, bred in the monastic school, the observer of ditchers, hucksters, and cut-purses in country lanes and London alehouses, using as his poetical instrument the rude alliterative measure long neglected even by the Saxon minstrel.

For all this the two men find themselves face to face with the same social diseases; and the ideal remedy for these evils, which each suggests, proceeds from a similar method of imaginative reasoning. Both held that the corruptions of their time arose out of the confusion between the temporal and spiritual powers; both conceived that it was the duty of Church and State to pursue their separate objects in the closest alliance; each was a firm upholder of the monarchical principle; each believed that the true

image of social order was revealed in the doctrine of the Catholic Church. The divergence between their ideas was due to a difference in the local circumstances to which the ideas had to be applied. For Dante in Italy the force of anarchy embodied itself mainly in the avarice and temporal ambition of the Popes, and in the lawlessness of the feudal aristocracy; his ideal was a development of the system of Charlemagne, a constitution under which the Emperor, as successor of the Cæsars, should be responsible for the maintenance of that temporal order which, in its true form, is the offspring of the Divine Will.

Langland's conception of society is much less symmetrical and logical than Dante's, partly because it is less learned, but partly also because it is more practical. His ideal is in many respects a reflection of the actual order of things under which he himself lived. As regards the authority of the Pope, he seems not to have gone so far as Wycliffe. He draws a sharp distinction between the power and person of the Pope; and of the former he says:—

Now hath the pope powere · pardoun to graunte the peple
With-outen eny penaunce · to passen in-to heuene.
This is owre beleue · as lettered men us techeth.

But for wicked Popes he has no respect:—

And God amende the pope · that pileth holy kirke,
And cleymeth bifor the kynge · to be keper ouer crystene,
And counteth not though crystene · ben culled[1] and robbed,
And fynt folke to fyghte · and cristene blode to spille[2]
Ayene the olde lawe and newe lawe · as Luke there-of witnesseth,
Non occides. mihi vindictam etc.
It semeth by so · himself hadde his wille[3]
That he reccheth right noughte · of al the remenaunte.

In another highly ironical passage he questions the use of paying Peter's pence:—

[1] Killed.
[2] And finds folk to fight for him and spill Christian blood,—alluding to the employment of mercenary soldiers in the wars of Pope and Anti-Pope
[3] If only he has his will.

I fynd payne[1] for the pope · and prouendre for his palfrey,
And I hadde neuere of hym · haue God my treuthe,
Neither prouendre ne parsonage · yut[2] of the popis yifte,
Saue a pardon with a peys of led · and two pollis amidde ![3]
Hadde iche a clerk that couthe write · I wolde caste hym a bille,
That he sente me under his seel · a salue for the pestilence,
And that his blessyng and his bulles · bocches mighte destroye :
In nomine meo demonia ejicient, et super ægros manus imponent et bene habebunt.
And thanne wolde I be prest to the peple · paste for to make,[4]
And buxome and busy · aboute bred and drinke
For hym and for alle his · fonde I[5] that his pardoun
Mighte lechen a man · as I bileue it shulde ·
For sith he hath the powere · that Peter hymself hadde
He hath the potte with the salue · sothly as me thinketh :
Argentum et aurum non est mihi; quod autem habeo, hoc tibi do; in nomine domini, surge et ambula.
Ac if mighte of miracle hym faille · it is for men ben nought worthy
To have the grace of God · and no gylte of the pope.

Apart, therefore, from his respect for the representative of "Holy Church," it is plain that Langland's reverence for the persons of particular Popes was on a par with Dante's, who showed no hesitation in consigning Boniface VIII. to one of the lowest circles of the Inferno. On the other hand, both poets would have been shocked if, from their independence of judgment, it had been inferred that they were anything but complete believers in that Catholic faith of which the successor of St. Peter was the legitimate guardian.

As regards the temporal power, many passages in the *Vision* seem to show that Langland, like Dante, was an advocate of absolute monarchy, tempered only by the restraints of reason and religion. For example:—

And thanne come there a kynge · and bi his croune seyde,
"I am Kynge with croune · the comune to reule,
And holy kirke and clergye · fro cursed[6] men to defende,
And if me lakketh to lyue · by the lawe will I take it

[1] Bread. [2] Yet.
[3] Save a pardon with a piece of lead, and two heads in the middle of it—*i.e.* those of St. Peter and St. Paul.
[4] Then would I readily make paste for the people.
[5] If I found. [6] Wicked.

There I may hastloketh it haue · for I am hed of lawe ;[1]
For ye ben but membres · and I aboue alle.
And sith I am yowre aller hed · I am yowre aller hele,[2]
And holy cherche chief help · and chiftaigne of the comune.
And what I take of yow two · I take it atte techynge
Of *spiritus justicie* · for I jugge yow alle ;
So I may baldely be houseled · for I borwe neuere,
Ne craue of my comune · but as my kynde asketh."[3]
"In condicioun," quod conscience · "that thow konne defende,
And reule thi rewme in resoun · right wel and in treuth,
Take thow may in resoun · as thi lawe asketh,[4]
Omnia tua sunt ad defendendum, sed non ad depredandum."

This absolutism, however, in Langland's mind, exists mainly in appearance, for he shows repeatedly that his political ideal is based upon the ecclesiastical conception of the Feudal System, whereby society was divided into three orders, *Oratores* (the Clergy), *Bellatores* (Knights), and *Laboratores* (Husbandmen). The king was the head of the Knights, and in this capacity he was bound to follow the advice of the council of his great vassals in all matters pertaining to the good of the realm. As the great landlord of the kingdom, his duty, in common with all other knights, was, as Piers the Plowman says,—

To kepe · holikirke and my-selue
Fro wastoures and fro wykkede men · that this worlde struyeth.

The knights themselves again had a moral duty to perform :—

"Ye and yit a poynt," quod Pieres · " I preye yow of more ;[5]
Loke ye tene no tenaunt · but treuthe wil assent[6]
And thowgh ye mowe amercy[7] hem · late mercy be taxour,
And mekenesse thi mayster · maugre Mede's chekes,

[1] And if I need maintenance I will take it by law wherever I can most readily, for I am head of the law.

[2] And as I am head of you all, so I am the health of you all.

[3] So I may be absolved without hesitation, since I never borrow or beg of my commons, save as my nature requires.

[4] It is noticeable that in his final version, when Richard II was misgoverning the country, the poet modified this principle to "thou mayst have what thou askest for as the law requires."

[5] Beside.

[6] Take care you harm no tenant unless truth assents.

[7] Fine them.

And thowgh pore men profre yow · presentis and yiftis
Nym it naughte, an auenture · ye mowe it naughte deserue;[1]
For thow shalt yelde it again · at one yeres ende,
In a ful perilous place · purgatorie it hatte.[2]
And mysbede noughte[3] thi bonde-men · the better may thow spede;
Thowgh he be thyn underlynge here · wel may happe in heuene,
That he worth worthier sette[4] · and with more blisse
Than thow, bot thow do bette[5] · and lyue as thow shulde;
Amice, ascende superius.
For in charnel atte chirche · cherles ben yuel to knowe,[6]
Or a knighte from a knaue there · knowe this in thin herte."

Granting the observance of these indispensable religious and moral conditions, Langland was evidently well disposed towards the Feudal System and regarded it as the repository of all temporal power. The great cause of corruption, in his view, was the confusion of the powers of the State through the avarice and ambition of the ecclesiastical order. He is constant in insisting on the supreme authority of the king in all matters of justice, even where the interests of the Church are concerned. On this principle was based his famous prophecy of the Reformation and the destruction of the monasteries:—

Ac there shal come a kyng · and confess yow religiouses[7]
And amende monyales[8] · monkes and chanouns,
And putten hem to her penance · *ad pristinum statum ire.*

. . . . . .

And thanne shal the abbot of Abyndoun · and alle his issu for euere
Have a knokke of a kynge · and incurable the wounde.

. . . . . .

"Thanne is do-wel and do-bet," quod I, "*dominus* and knighthode."

He afterwards goes on to qualify this conclusion by showing from Scripture how hard it is for the rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven. But from a temporal point of view he shows that he considers wealth and high birth to be essential for the maintenance of knighthood:—

1 Take it not lest perchance thou shouldest not deserve it.
2 It is called purgatory.
3 Injure not.
4 He will be placed more worthily.
5 Unless thou do better than he.
6 Churls are known with difficulty.
7 Monks.
8 Nuns.

For made neuere kynge no knyghte · but he hadde catel to sperde,
As bifel for a knyghte · or fonde hym for his strengthe ;
It is a careful knyghte · and of a caytive kynges makynge,
That hath no londe ne lynage riche · ne good loos of his handes.[1]

On the other hand all mischief, he thinks, proceeds from the attempts of the clergy, who ought to set an example of holy poverty, to emulate the splendour of knighthood :—

Ac now is religioun a ryder · a rowmer bi stretes,
A leder of louedayes · and a lond-bugger,
A priker on a palfray · fro manere to manere,
An heep of houndes at his ers · as he a lorde were ²
And but if his knaue knele · that shal his cuppe brynge,
He lowreth on hym, and axyth hym · who taughte hym curtesye ?
Litel had lordes to done · to yyve londe fram her heires
To Religious that haue no reuthe · though it reyne on here auteres.[3]

In the same way, as the reader will already have observed in the analysis of the *Vision*, the effects of Mede are represented as being most disastrous among the clergy of all orders—monks, friars, pardoners, archdeacons, parish priests, and the like—just because the pursuit of worldly goods by these men carried them farther from their religious profession than was the case with the laity.

But Langland's view of the temporal order of the State springs from, and is logically dependent upon, his scheme of spiritual life, out of which arises his fundamental conception of Piers the Ploughman. He makes this apparent at the very outset of his allegory, when Holy Church explains the phenomena of the Field Full of Folk. The field is life. All men are the children of Truth (God the Father), who has given us all things

[illegible]

of hounds at his back as though he were a lord.—Love-days were days for the settlement of disputes by arbitration. Much injustice was often done to the poor at these institutions.

[3] Ill it becomes lords to leave away land from their heirs to monks who care not though the rain comes in on their altars

really necessary to sustain life—clothes, meat, and drink. Hence the most essential class in society is the class of labourers (*laboratores*), which is accordingly appointed by the commons to provide the sustenance of the realm; and of this class Piers the Ploughman is a member. When he is first introduced to us, Piers is represented as a labourer of Truth, who, from his simple, honest, and straightforward character, is able to direct the other pilgrims on the way to his master's shrine. In company with the knight, he undertakes to do all that is necessary for the preservation of society:—

"Bi seynt Poule," quod Perkyn · "ye profre yow so faire,
That I shal swynke, and swete · and sowe for us bothe,
And other laboures do for thi loue · al my lyf time,
In couenant that thow kepe · holikerke and my-selue
Fro wastours and fro wykked men · that this worlde struyeth.
And go hunte hardiliche · to hares and foxes,
To bores and to brockes · that breketh adown myne hegges.
And go affaite[1] the faucones · wilde foules to kille;
For suche cometh to my croft · and croppeth my whete."
Curteislich the knyghte thanne · comsed thise wordes:
"By my power, Pieres," quod he · "I plighte thee my trothe,
To fulfil this forward · though I fighte sholde;
Als long as I lyue · I shal the mayntene."

Here we have, so to speak, the Feudal System in a nutshell. The labouring classes of all kinds appear prominently throughout the *Vision*, and their performances whenever they are mentioned are tested by the standard of Piers the Ploughman. Lazy, incompetent, or dishonest workmen are judged with no less severity than false hermits or hypocritical friars; famine and pestilence are just judgments sent upon them by God for the neglect of their duties. The first and second drafts of the *Vision* had appeared before the great uprising of the commons, and it is evident from the letter of John Ball to the commons of Essex that the poem was widely known.[2] But it could have had nothing to do with stirring up insurrectionary passions; for it is plain that, on the whole, Langland's sympathies were with the knightly classes, and that he even approved of the Statute of Labourers and the

[1] Train. [2] Skeat, *Piers the Plowman*, vol. ii. p. lv.

customary laws which made the condition of the "villein" class almost intolerable. Though he was most intimately acquainted with every detail of the life of labourers, both in town and country, his view of their state is not that of the political agitator, but of the moralist or man of religion. Toil and labour, he thinks, is the consequence of the fall of man; men may therefore be made to work, and there is no answering the argument of Hunger from Genesis iii. 19:—

"Ye, I bihote the," quod Hunger · "or ellis the bible lieth.
Go to Genesis the gyaunt · the engendrour of us alle;
In sudore and swynke · thow shalt thi mete tilye
And laboure for thi lyflode · and so owre lord hyghte.
And *Sapience* seyth the same · I seigh it in the bible,
Piger pro frigore · no felde nolde tilye,
And therefore he shal begge and bidde · and no man bete his hunger."[1]

Opposed at every point to the idle and dishonest labourer, Piers the Ploughman, when we first meet with him, is the type of the true-hearted workman, doing his duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call him, and therefore seeing Truth so clearly that he is able to show the way to all the wandering pilgrims of the world. In the latter part of the *Vision* the conception of the ploughman becomes much more metaphysical. The question arises, "What is the *Vita de Do-Bet?*" The answer, following the text of Corinthians i. 13, is Charity or Love. But who is Charity? asks the dreamer. "Without the help of Piers the Ploughman," is the reply, "thou canst never see his person."

And that knoweth no clerke · ne creature in erthe
But Piers the plowman · petrus, id est Cristus.

By one of those allegorical transformations which abound in the *Vision*, Charity then changes from a person into a tree, tended by Piers the Ploughman as gardener; and afterwards is again turned into the person of the Good Samaritan, who appears riding to a "joust in Jerusalem" Finally to this jousting—

[1] He would till no field; therefore he shall beg and pray, and no man shall remedy his hunger.

One semblable to the Samaritan · and some del to Piers the plowman,
Barfote on an asse bakke · botelees cam prikye,
With-oute spores other spere · spaklich he loked,
As is kynde of a knyghte · that cometh to be dubbed,
To geten hym gylt spores · or galoches y-couped.[1]

Thus the simple, truth-telling character of the honest "villein" is now transfigured into the meek and lowly person of the Redeemer; the ploughman assumes the attributes of the knight; and, to make the allegory still more subtle and refined, the new champion is represented not as being actually Piers the Ploughman, but as wearing his coat-armour, in other words, being incarnate in human nature. Nor is this the last of the transformations. When the Redeemer, having gained the victory in the jousting, has passed away from the earth, He leaves His Spirit to descend on Piers the Ploughman, who, now typifying the Christian Church, once more resumes his old elemental employment of ploughing and sowing; a fine stroke of art, whereby the unity of conception, underlying all the kaleidoscopic changes of the *Vision,* is clearly marked.

To sum up the points of agreement and difference between Dante and Langland—for this is the best way to appreciate the place occupied by the latter in English poetry—both poets present an image of the ideal or spiritual order of nature and human society, in striking contrast with the actual course of the world. In both of them this idea of truth is founded on the authority of Scripture, expanded and illustrated by the received doctrine of the Church. The *Vision of Piers the Plowman,* like the *Divine Comedy,* abounds in allusions to those sources of encyclopædic learning which constituted the science of the period. But Dante's conception was based on the metaphysical side of Catholic Christianity; Langland's on the ethical and practical side. The former, on the wings of imagination, dares to penetrate to the inmost recesses of

[1] One like the Samaritan, and in some degree like Piers the Ploughman, barefoot on ass's back, came riding without boots, without spurs or spear. Sprightly he looked after the manner of a knight who comes to be dubbed, to get him gilt spurs or slashed shoes.

Being, and in that region all his doubts and difficulties are resolved for him by the explanations of Beatrice or Theology. Thus initiated into the divine scheme of nature, Reason demonstrates to him infallibly, by the deductive method, what must necessarily be the true principle of political and social order. In other words, his ideas are those of the Florentine citizen, accustomed to the refined methods of civil government, and so well versed in the subtleties of the scholastic system, that all the laws and arrangements of the unseen world rest for him on a secure foundation of spiritual logic. The *Divine Comedy* is in poetry what the *Summa Theologiæ* is in Philosophy.

While Dante is in poetry the intellectual child of the Schoolmen, Langland has more affinity to that family of Christian thought which has, from the earliest times, endeavoured to translate the text of the Gospel as literally as possible into human action. From this unqualified assertion of Christian duty arose most of the sects condemned by the Church as heretical. Montanists, Paulicians, Waldenses, Fraticelli, Lollards, Anabaptists, unconnected with each other in their immediate origin, all bear on their face the evidence of their common descent from a single principle, namely, to act according to their own interpretation of the letter of Christ's precepts, without regard to the reserves of worldly experience. At once simple and mystical—simple because they acknowledge no authority beyond the plain words of Scripture, and mystical because they allow no merit to any action not proceeding from the state of Grace—they have constantly been brought into collision with constituted authority both in Church and State. On the other hand, from their lofty ethical standard, they have always exerted a powerful influence on society. They have, up to a certain point, enlisted as their followers not only enthusiasts, but philosophers, statesmen, soldiers, and other members of the professional classes, who, however exceptional may be their own spiritual experience, in practice direct their conduct by the rules of common sense.

Among those who felt their power was Langland, one

of those great and rare intelligences which, by uniting in themselves opposite qualities and experiences, are able to translate ideas into action. In him were embodied the characteristics which distinguished, on the one hand, the men of the Renaissance, and, on the other, the men of the Reformation; the moral earnestness of Bunyan and Milton, the practical sense of Chaucer and Shakespeare. Trained in the learning of the schools, he was not less intimately acquainted with all the standards of morals and manners accepted in the working world. While he had meditated, not without sympathy, on the doctrines of the Lollards and socialists of his time, he was far from approving of their practical conclusions; and he remained unmoved, equally by Wycliffe's views of Transubstantiation, and by John Ball's sermons on social equality. In common with the Franciscans, he exalts the virtues of poverty and charity, but he recognises that poverty is not a desirable condition for every order in the State; and though he preaches the gospel of love, his strongest denunciations are directed against the abuses of justice. Contrarily, while he upholds the existing hierarchy of society, he insists on the essential equality of men in the sight of God, and lays bare, with all the tremendous force of satire, the falsities and hypocrisies which corrupt the springs of social action. As he accepts without question the actual constitution of things, he makes no attempt to subject it to the test of any symmetrical logical ideal, and it is a characteristic feature of difference in the *Divine Comedy*, as compared with the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, that Dante's constant guide is Theology, while Langland's favourite abstraction is Conscience. So long as the dreamer follows the direction of this principle, and the plain scriptural teaching of Piers the Ploughman, he pronounces unhesitating judgment on the moral evils of his time: when, on the contrary, he seeks to examine the metaphysical foundations of the "Life of Do-Well," and puts himself for the purpose to school with such teachers as Wit, Thought, Study, and Clergy, he loses himself in a maze of doubt and bewilderment. In all this Langland shows himself a thoroughly representative Englishman.

These radical differences in the ideals of the two poets are reflected in their different methods of art. Both adopt the machinery of allegory, but put it to completely opposite uses. With Dante allegory is an integral part of his system of thought. Following the lead of St. Thomas Aquinas, he held that the visible universe and human society were images of the mind of God, and hence, in his system, every phenomenal object was a symbol of some form of existence in the real world of spiritual being. The entire scene and action of the *Divine Comedy* is placed in the universe invisible to mortal eyes, but all the knowledge of astronomy and optics possessed by Dante is pressed into his service to describe the objects there revealed to him. Each of the planets, for example, is represented as being peopled with the souls of the blessed, but the poet is careful to explain that this supposed distinction of abode must not be taken to signify a real separation, but merely to convey a spiritual idea to the mind by means of a sensible image.[1] In the same manner, when, in company with Beatrice, he enters the Empyrean Heaven, he relates how he beheld "a light in form of a river radiant with rays between two banks painted by a wondrous spring, wherefrom issued living sparks, and from all sides settled in the flowers like rubies set in gold." Beatrice, however, warns the poet not to mistake these objects for what they appeared, since, she says, "the river and the topazes that enter it and issue from it, and the smile of the herbage, are but shadow-bearing prefaces of the truth; not that in themselves the things are hard, but there is a defect on your side, who have never yet seen sights of such splendour."[2] Each feature in the topography of the poem and all its *dramatis personæ*, are symbolical of some hidden truth. Thus Purgatory is the exact antipodes

[1] Così parlar conviensi al vostro ingegno,
Perocchè solo da sensato apprende
Ciò che fa poscia d' intelletto degno.
Per questo la Scrittura condiscende
A vostra facultate, e piedi e mano
Attribuisce a Dio, ed altro intende

Paradiso, iv 40-45.

[2] *Ibid.* xxx. 61-81.

of Jerusalem: the seven stairs of Purgatory correspond to the seven deadly sins: the seven planets are correlative with the seven liberal sciences: Leah and Rachel, the Countess Matilda and Beatrice, typify respectively the active and contemplative life of man. I can recall but few impersonations of abstract qualities by Dante:[1] on the contrary, even when he describes himself as being in a vision, if he wishes to symbolise the deadly sin of sloth, he employs the image of a siren; and, when he intends to signify Imperial justice he introduces an eagle, the emblem of the Roman power.[2] This allegorical habit is the very essence not only of Dante's thought, but also of his style: he expresses nothing directly, everything by way of metaphor, simile, and allusion. In a word, in the *Divine Comedy* we seem to be listening to the muse of Latin Christianity, speaking to us with the compact philosophy of the schools, with the trained eloquence of Florentine statecraft, and with all the sweetness and refinement of the formed Italian language.

Langland's method is the exact reverse of all this. Allegory in him has nothing to do with philosophy, but is merely a poetical vehicle of moral thought. There is no poetical unity in his design beyond the person of the dreamer, and his machinery consists of a succession of separate and unconnected visions, each presenting a familiar scene of real life; such as a trial in the king's courts, a shriving of penitents, or a pilgrimage, from which the audience may easily infer the spiritual truth which it is intended to convey. While the *Divine Comedy* is crowded with images of actual persons and things, typifying some invisible form of existence, the *Vision of Piers Plowman* represents a drama in which all the actors are for the most part abstract qualities, though their deeds and words resemble those of persons in real life. It is easy to see that Langland derived his conception of allegory

[1] Even the Cardinal and Theological Virtues in the *Purgatorio* are represented as "nymphs" (canto xxi. 106) or "ladies" (canto xxix. 121). The only abstractions I can remember in the *Divine Comedy* are the Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, and Principalities of the *Paradiso*, canto xxviii.

[2] *Purgatorio*, xix. 1-24; *Paradiso*, xviii. 73-126.

mainly from the Miracle Plays, by means of which the clergy instructed the people at the high festivals of the Church, and which combined the moral and religious teaching of the homily with the exciting movement of the drama. He had studied the literary style of poems like the *Romance of the Rose*, Grosseteste's *Chastel d'Amour*, and De Guileville's *Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*; but on the whole, the colloquial and dramatic forms he adopts show that the *Vision* was composed with a view rather to recitation in public than to private reading. Langland thus combined the old traditions both of Anglo-Saxon minstrelsy and Anglo-Saxon preaching, and this elemental method of conception furnishes the keynote to the style of the entire poem. When he has once set his characters on the stage, his sole thought is to make them convey sound moral instruction, often without the least regard for dramatic consistency. For example, in the description of the seven deadly sins, Envy, Pride, and Lechery are properly conducted to the confessional of Repentance, and justly describe themselves by showing their *effects* on the human heart. But Wrath says: "*I* was sometime *a frere*"; Avarice relates how he served an apprenticeship to "Symme atte stile"; while Gluttony, drinking at the alehouse with Wat the warrener, Cis the female cobbler, and Tim the tinker, has at last actually to be put to bed by his wife and daughter. So, too, Hunger is at first brought in as a moral agent, who helps Piers the Ploughman in his struggle with Wastour, by way of enforcing the Scripture moral, that if a man will not work neither shall he eat. This personage, however, is afterwards transformed into Famine, and is represented as a pest devouring all the substance of the countryside. The fable of the mice belling the cat is woven into the main action of the allegory, as if it were an incident actually occurring in the "field full of folk."

No attempt is made to preserve dignity or elevation in the speeches of the more venerable personages, the aim of the author being to bring home his truths to the audience by means of their own familiar idioms.

In this respect his work furnishes a striking contrast to that of Dante. When the latter saw the souls in the First Heaven of the Moon, he says he thought they were merely mirrored images, so like were they to the faint reflections seen in a shallow stream. Beatrice *smiled* at his mistake.

Non ti maravigliar perch' io sorrida,
  Mi disse, appresso il tuo pueril coto,
  Poi sopra il vero ancor lo piè non fida,
Ma te rivolve, come suole, a voto;
  Vere sustanzie son ciò che tu vedi,
  Qui rilegate per manco di voto.[1]

Compare this with the address in Langland's *Vision* of Holy Church to the dreamer when he tells her that he has no natural knowledge of what Truth is:—

"*Thou doted daffe,*" quod she · "dulle are thi wittes.
To litel latyn thou lernedst · lede in thi youthe.
  Hei mihhi, quod sterilem duxi vitam iuuenilem!
It is a kynde knowynge," quod she · "that kenneth in thi herte
For to louye thi lorde · lever than thi-selue;
No dedly synne to do · dey though thou sholdest;
This I trow be treuthe · who can teche the better,
Loke thow suffre hym to sey · and sithen lere it after."[2]

This is exactly the manner in which the Mystery Poet would have conveyed his instruction; but it scarcely seems a style appropriate to Holy Church. On the other hand the realistic portraits of the seven deadly sins are equally admirable for the propriety of their symbolism and for their close observation of nature. The painting of Envy is unsurpassed in power:—

Enuye with heuy herte · asked after schrifte,
And carefullich *mea culpa* · he comsed to shewe.

[1] "Marvel not that I smile," said she to me, "at thy childish thought, since thou dost not yet trust thy foot upon the truth, but dost turn round, as the custom is, upon vacancy. True substances are these that thou seest, sent here for the neglect of a vow."—*Paradiso*, iii. 25.

[2] "Stupid dolt," quoth she, "dull are thy wits. Too little Latin didst thou learn in thy youth: 'Hei mihi quod sterilem duxi vitam juvenilem.' It is natural knowledge," quoth she, "that teacheth thee in thy heart to love thy lord better than thyself, to do no deadly sin, though thou shouldst die for it: this, I trow, is truth: if any can teach thee better, look that thou let him have his say, and afterwards teach it."

He was pale as a pelet · in the palsye he semed,
And clothed in a caury-maury · I couthe it noughte descryue;
In kirtel and kourteby · and a knyf bi his syde.
Of a frere's frokke · were the forsleues,
And as a leke hadde yleye · longe in the sonne,
So loked he with lere chekes · louryrge foule.
His body was to-bolle for wratthe · that he bote his lippes,
And wryngyrge he yede with the fiste · to wreke hym-selfe he
thoughte
With workes or with wordes · whanne he seigh his tyme.
Eche a worde that he warpe · was of an adres tonge,
Of chydynge and of chalangynge · was his chief lyflode,
With bakbytinge and bismer · and beryng of fals witnesse.[1]

The figure of Avarice recalls one of the misers of Quentyn Matsys:—

And thanne cam Coueytise · can I hym nought descryue,
So hungriliche and holwe · Sire Heruey hym loked.
He was bitel-browed · and baber-lipped also
With two blered eyghen · as a blinde hagge;
And as a letheren purs · lolled his chekes,
Wel sydder than his chyn · thei cheueled for elde;
And as a bondman of his bacoun · his berd was bi-drauelled.
With an hode on his hed · a lousi hatte aboue,
And in a tauny tabarde · of twelue wynter age
Al to-torn and baudy · and ful of lys crepynge;
But if that a lous couthe · han lopen the bettre
She sholde not haue walked on that welche · so was it thred-bare.[2]

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[1] Envy with heavy heart prayed for absolution, and carefully commenced to show *mea culpa*. He was pale as a pellet (*i.e.* a stone ball used for slinging): he seemed in a palsy, and was clothed in caury-maury (*i.e.* coarse material) such as I cannot describe, in an under-jacket, and short cloak with a knife by his side. The fore-sleeves were like those of a friar's gown, and like a leek that had lain long in the sun, so looked he with lean cheeks, louring foully. His body was swollen for wrath, so that he bit his lips, and went wringing with his fist: he thought to avenge himself with deeds or words, when he saw his time. Each word he uttered was like an adder's tongue; his main livelihood was in chiding and challenging, with back biting, and calumny, and bearing false witness.

[2] Then came Covetousness—I cannot describe him—so hungerly and hollow, he looked like Sir Hervey. He was beetle-browed and thick-lipped, with two bleared eyes, like a blind hag, and his cheeks lolled like a leather purse, even below his chin: they shivered with old age, and his beard was all bedrabbled, like a bondman's with his bacon; with a hood on his head, and above it a lousy hat, and in a tawny coat twelve winters old, all tattered and dirty and full of lice creeping; and if only a louse could have leapt better, she would not have walked on that cloth, so thread bare was it.

It is in such passages as these that Langland produces his most striking effects. Yet his imagination is capable of rising far above this Flemish accuracy of detail into regions familiar to Dante and Milton. There are few more sublime passages in poetry than his description of the awful pause that prevailed in the operations of Nature during the three days' entombment of the Saviour. Mercy and Truth, Righteousness and Peace, are represented discoursing together in the darkness on the scheme of Redemption, and wondering as to the light which is seen burning afar off about the gates of hell. Then, with a rapid transition, the poet carries us away to listen to the dialogue between the Powers of Darkness and the victorious Redeemer, who demands admission to the infernal dungeon. Satan, Lucifer, and their peers vainly resist His voice; but the gates of hell may not prevail against Him; and amid the triumphant chorus, "Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in," Christ descends into hell, and brings forth the souls of the patriarchs and prophets.[1]

In another passage, referring incidentally to the Crucifixion, he employs imagery of remarkable picturesqueness:

> The sonne for sorwe thereof · les suyte for a tyme;
> Aboute mydday, whan most lighte is · and meal-tyme of seintes,
> Feddest with thi fresshe blode · owre forefadres in derknesse;
>   *Populus qui ambulat in tenebris, vidit lucem magnam,*
> And throw the lighte that lepe out of the · Lucifer was blent
> And blewe alle the blessed into the blisse of paradise.[2]

Confused and bewildered in the maze of encyclopædic learning, seeking an impossible ideal in a social structure whose foundations had fallen into decay, the allegory of Langland, nevertheless, shows a depth of religious feeling

[1] Compare the parallel passage in the *Cursor Mundi* cited on p. 139, and also the analysis of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, pp. 44, 45.

[2] The sun for sorrow thereof lost sight for a time; about mid-day when there is most light, and at the meal-time of saints, thou didst feed with thy fresh blood our forefathers in darkness; and with the light that leaped out of thee Lucifer was blinded, and all thy blessed ones were wafted into the bliss of Paradise.

and a fund of political good sense which make it a mirror of the mind of the English people, and particularly of its Anglo-Saxon element, in the latter part of the fourteenth century. The strength of this popular instinct further manifests itself in the language and metre in which the thought of the poem is conveyed. Langland deliberately sought his vehicle of expression in the ancient Anglo-Saxon form of verse, and in doing so, though he may have perhaps adapted himself to an immediate demand of taste, he sacrificed the claim of his work to be ranked among the masterpieces of English poetry.

No fault, indeed, can be found with his language on the score of pedantry. Like Chaucer, he was always ready to make use of any word that served his purpose, and in spite of the Teutonic mould of his metre, he imports materials from France with as much freedom as his great contemporary. Addressing himself, as he evidently did, to the less educated part of the nation, he writes in a style which may be called colloquial, and which, from the mixture of dialects it contains, raises the presumption that the intercourse between the different parts of the country must have been frequent. But, *in his versification, he conforms as strictly as he can* to the alliterative forms which the natural development of the language tended to throw into disuse. So long as poetry was combined with minstrelsy these forms had served their purpose. Each verse contained three alliterative words, two of which were placed in the first half, and the third in the second, an arrangement which allowed for the just distribution of accent and emphasis In the early stage of the Anglo-Saxon language, while the old inflected forms of words remained unimpaired, the art of the poet in this way readily co-operated with the art of the singer, the result being a succession of energetic phrases, defined by the cæsura of the verse, which must have enabled the harper to chant his narrative in a clear, if somewhat monotonous recitative. No one who examines the early specimens of Anglo-Saxon poetry can fail to be struck with the number of "Adonic" verses it contains But as the inflections of nouns and verbs gradually

dropped off, and as their places were supplied by auxiliary words, the character of the language became more and more monosyllabic, and whatever it gained in logical precision it lost in compactness of harmony.

Langland religiously preserved the ancient framework of the alliterative verse, and though he is not always strict in his adherence to rule, the march of his rhythm is on the whole steady and regular. But a comparison of the opening of his *Vision* with the rhythmical movement in the *Battle of Brunanburh* will show the difficulties under which he laboured. The latter poem opens as follows :—

> Ädelstan cyning, eorla drehten,
> Beoma beáhgyfa, and his brodor eâc
> Eâdmund ädeling, ealdorlangne tyr
> Geslogon ät säcce sveorde ecgum
> Ymbe Brunanburh ; bordveall clufon,
> Heovon headolinde hamera lâfun,
> Eaforan Eádveardes, svâ him geädele vas
> From eneómægun, that hie at campe oft
> Vidh lathra gehväne land ealgodon
> Hord and hâmas.[1]

This is the beginning of the *Vision of Piers Plowman* :—

> In a somer seson · whan soft was the sonne,
> I shope me in shroudes · as I a shepe were,
> In habite as an heremite · unholy of workes,
> Went wyde in this worlde · wondres to here.
> Ac on a May mornynge · on Maluerne hulles
> Me bifell a ferly · of fairy me thoughte ;
> I was wery forwandred · and wente me to reste
> Under a brode banke · bi a bornes side,
> And as I lay and lened · and loked on the wateres,
> I slombered in a slepying · it sweyued so merye.

The sublime semi-lyrical chant of the first passage is well conveyed in alliterative verse. In Langland's narrative, on the contrary, which is at once didactic, satiric,

[1] *Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen Poesie*, Grein Text, 353: King Athelstan, lord of earls, dispenser of rings to warriors, and also his brother, Edmund the Atheling, obtained lasting glory with the sword-edge in battle at Brunanburh. They clave the board-wall, hewed the war-lindens, with leavings of hammers, Edward's offspring, as was natural to them from their ancestry, that they often in battle, against every foe, should defend their lands, hoard and homes.

and colloquial, the movement of the verse, even where the imagery is beautiful, is disagreeably monotonous, and lends itself to cheap tricks of alliteration. Thus:—

> And whan it haued of this fold · flesshe and blode taken
> Was neuer lief upon lynde · lighter ther-after,
> And portatyf and persant · as the poynt of a nedle,
> That might non armure it lette · ne non heigh walles.[1]

Or—

> Drede is at the laste
> Lest Crist in consistorie · accorse ful manye.[2]

Or—

> Matthew with mannes face · mouthed thise wordes.[3]

The frequent occurrence of French words in [illegible] *Vision* (examples of them may be seen above) [illegible] indicate that the poet exercised an arbitrary [illegible] in rejecting the Norman metres, long [illegible] country, for the more ancient Saxon form. [illegible] this course he was indeed far from being [illegible] whatever was the cause, it is certain that [illegible] of the thirteenth century, there was a [illegible] among English poets to revive the [illegible] Whether Langland was animated by [illegible] and desired, like Nævius, to oppose [illegible] of foreign culture, by showing the [illegible] models, or whether he thought [illegible] for whom he wrote would be [illegible] ancient rhythms of their race, [illegible] attractions of French verse, [illegible] the *conditions required to* [illegible] posterity. As a people the [illegible] merged with their Norman [illegible]

[1] And when it (the Truth) [illegible] linden leaf was afterwards [illegible] needle, so that no armour [illegible]

[2] There is dread lest at the [illegible] The Consistory was an [illegible]

[3] Matthew with the [illegible] symbolical representation of St. [illegible] as a lion; St. Luke as a [illegible]

which had assimilated the qualities of each stock; as a separate language Anglo-Saxon had ceased to exist; and in resuscitating a form of metrical expression which time and the nature of things had rendered obsolete, Langland, with all his wit, imagination, and genius, abandoned to a greater inventor the honour of being recognised as the earliest classic poet of England.

The son of John Chaucer, a citizen of London, he was born, probably in that city, between 1330 and 1340, and seems to have been received at an early age into the household of the Countess of Ulster, wife of Lionel of Clarence. He served in the expedition to France in 1359 which terminated in the Peace of Bretigny; and, having been taken prisoner in a skirmish, was ransomed in March 1360, after about two months' imprisonment. In 1367 his name appears as a member of the royal household, where he is described as being *dilectus valettus noster*, and as the recipient from the king of twenty marks a year, that is to say of about £140 according to present value. Two years later he is found again campaigning in France. He must have been by this time recognised as a man of abilities and accomplishments, for in the ten years following he was frequently employed on important diplomatic missions. In 1373 he paid his first visit to Italy, having been appointed one of the commissioners for negotiating with Genoa respecting the establishment of a factory for commerce on the English coast; and, if we are to take his own statement literally, he must at this period have made the acquaintance of Petrarch. For his services on that occasion he was liberally rewarded by the king. The next year he received from the king the grant of a pitcher of wine daily in the port of London, an allowance that was afterwards commuted for the yearly payment of twenty marks, besides which he was granted by the city authorities the lease of a house above the city gate of Aldgate on condition of his keeping it in good repair. He was also in this year made comptroller of the customs, and in 1375 he obtained from the king the wardship of the lands of Edmond Staplegate, a rich minor in the county of Kent, as well as the less valuable wardship of the heir of William de Soles in the same county.

All these bounties are signs of the high favour in which he was held, and further proof of confidence was given in 1377 when he was twice employed on diplomatic missions, first to Flanders, and afterwards to France, for the purpose of negotiating a peace. Soon after the

accession of Richard II. he was again sent to France to arrange a marriage between the king and a French princess, but the negotiations led to no result. Later in the year 1378 he went to Italy to treat with Barnabo Visconti and Sir John Hawkwood regarding the king's expedition of war. In 1385 he was allowed some relaxation in his official business by appointing a deputy to act as comptroller of the wool quay; and in 1386 he was elected as a knight of the shire for the county of Kent. Closely associated with the interests of John of Gaunt, he shared his patron's disfavour with the Parliament, being deprived in December of this year of all his appointments. In 1389, however, fortune again smiled upon him, and he was appointed clerk of the king's works in the Palace of Westminster and other places, an extremely lucrative post. He was so unfortunate in the next year as to be twice robbed in the same day of the king's money, first at Westminster and afterwards near Hatcham, in Surrey; but he was relieved of the obligation of making good the loss. From 1392 to 1398, when Richard II. was governing the country by himself, Chaucer seems to have been out of employment; and in the latter year he was apparently in distress, for he was sued for debt, and failed to appear (*non est inventus*); while soon afterwards the records show him humbly petitioning the king, in the name of charity, for a hogshead of wine, which was granted him. The accession of Henry Bolingbroke, son of his old patron, in 1399, put an end to his distresses; his pension was doubled; but as his name does not appear in the official records after 1400, it may be assumed that death did not allow him to enjoy the fruits of recovered prosperity for more than a year.

Chaucer was married. His wife's Christian name was Philippa, and though her surname is not known, it would appear to be not improbable that she was a lady in the household of the Countess of Ulster, who is entered in the accounts as "Philippa Pan," *i.e. Panetaria*, or superintendent of the pantry. She received in 1372 a pension from John of Gaunt for services rendered to his second

wife Constance of Castile, and she apparently died in the year 1387. From the reflections on the married state made in the "Wife of Bath's Tale" and elsewhere in his works, it has been inferred that Chaucer's domestic life was not a happy one. The inference is not absolutely necessary, for satires upon marriage had become one of the commonplaces of poetry since the example set in the *Romance of the Rose;* but some colour is given to it by a passage in the *House of Fame,* which it seems difficult to interpret in any other sense than as a personal allusion.[1]

Though these details furnish no key to the personal character and genius of Chaucer, they illustrate what is perhaps the most essential feature in his work. Before him all the chief poets who had used the Anglo-Saxon or the early English language, Cædmon, Cynewulf, Layamon, the author of the *Cursor Mundi,* Robert of Brunne, Langland himself, had been clergymen, and had therefore composed their poems in a clerical spirit. Chaucer was a layman, and though his mind had evidently been trained in the encyclopædic course prescribed by the Church, his ideas were enlarged and corrected by the education of political experience. He served the king in the court, in the battle-field, and in diplomatic and civil employments, and in these capacities he acquired that varied knowledge of the world, the full fruits of which are seen in the noble design of the *Canterbury Tales.* His learning was as wide as his social experience. Not only was he versed in the French poetry, fashionable at the French and English courts, but he had read the masterpieces of Italian prose and poetry, and besides having studied many of the theological and philosophical works of the mediæval doctors of the Church, he was an ardent admirer of Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, Statius, and Boethius. His knowledge of astronomy, as it was then understood, was exact, and he had evidently pushed his inquiries some distance into alchemy. His in fact was

The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's tongue, sword, eye,

[1] See hereafter, p. 275.

and no man could have been better equipped, socially and intellectually, for the foundation of a new literature. But before considering him as a poet, it is of importance to determine the list of his works that may be regarded as undoubtedly genuine.

Upon this point we have in the first place his own testimony. In his *Legend of Good Women* he makes Alcestis plead on his behalf, as follows:

> He made the boke that hight the House of Fame,
> And eke the Deth of Blanche the Duchesse,
> And the Parlement of Foules, as I gesse,
> And al the love of Palamon and Arcite
> Of Thebes, thogh the storye is knowen lyte;
> And manye an ympne for your holy dayes,
> That highten Balades, Roundels, Virelayes;
> And for to speke of other halynesse,
> He hath in prose translated Boece,
> And made the Lyfe also of Saynte Cecile
> He made also, goone ys a grete while,
> Origenes upon the Maudeleyne

In the Prologue to the "Man of Lawe's Tale" he further says, that in his youth he wrote the story of *Ceis and Alcyone*, an obvious allusion to the tale on this subject inserted in the *Book of the Duchess.* Besides the poems enumerated in the passage just cited, the God of Love, in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, accuses him of having translated the *Romaunt of the Rose* and *Troilus and Cressida* As the *Legend* was clearly written before the publication of the *Canterbury Tales*, the list of the poet's authentic works that it contains cannot be regarded as exhaustive. But from himself we learn nothing more, nor is any further information afforded by the catalogue of his writings furnished in the *Fall of Princes* by Lydgate, who merely repeats in other words the substance of what is said in the Prologue to the *Legend.* John Shirley, however, an enthusiastic admirer of Chaucer, who died in 1456, aged ninety, leaving a MS. copy of the poet's works, includes in it, besides the poems avowed by Chaucer, the *A. B. C*, the *Complaynt unto Pite*, *A Complaynt to His Lady*, *Queen Anelida and False Arcite*, the

Complaynts of Mars and Venus, *Chaucer to his Emptie Purse*, *Fortune*, *Truth*, *Gentilesse*, *Chaucer's Woordes unto his own Scrivener*, and *Lak of Stedfastnesse.* From MSS. of good authority in the fifteenth century and from other quarters the following additions may safely be made to the above list: *L'Envoy to Bukton*, *Merciles Beaute*, *The Former Age*, *L'Envoy to Scogan*, *To Rosemounde*, *Balade against Women Unconstaunt*, *Proverbs*, and *An Amorous Complaint.*

The first edition of Chaucer's collected poems was published in 1532 by W. Thynne, and has served as the groundwork of all subsequent editions. All the poems contained in it are unquestionably genuine; but some poems, which are certainly Chaucer's, are omitted. This edition was reprinted by John Stowe in 1561, with large additions, and among them the translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, and the *Court of Love.* As to the former of these poems, Chaucer himself says that he translated it in his youth; but there is no external evidence to show that the translation included by Stowe in his works was made by him, while the omission of the piece from Shirley's MS. and from Thynne's edition raises a presumption against its authenticity. It is now, however, held by the highest authorities that the first 1705 lines in the translation are probably Chaucer's, while the remainder, written as it is in the Northern dialect, proceeds from another hand. The *Court of Love*, in which the final *e* is almost entirely suppressed for metrical purposes, can hardly have been composed earlier than the beginning of the sixteenth century. Thynne's edition, thus augmented by Stowe, was reproduced by Thomas Speght in 1598 and 1602 with still further enlargements, the chief of which were *Chaucer's Dream* and *The Flower and the Leaf.* From internal evidence it appears that neither of these poems ought to be included in the list of Chaucer's authentic works.[1]

[1] The foregoing particulars respecting the Life and Works of Chaucer are mainly derived from the great edition of the poet by Professor Skeat, a work of inestimable value to all students of English Literature. Such references to

Looking to the compositions which may be confidently accepted as his own, it is plain that, in determining Chaucer's place in English poetry, he must be regarded first as a translator, next as an imitator, and then as an inventor; while, in the first capacity, we must observe the improvements he effected in the art, not only by refining the harmony of the language, but also by expanding and elevating the range of imagination.

1. The first tribute paid to Chaucer's genius is a poetical address sent to him by Eustace Deschamps, an eminent French contemporary poet, who speaks of him as "Grant *Translateur*, noble Geoffroi Chaucier."[1] This title he had acquired by his translation of the *Roman de la Rose*, made, as he tells us, in his youth, and by his translation in prose of the *De Consolatione* of Boethius, which he probably finished about 1380. The poem generally known as *Chaucer's ABC*, which he is said to have written as an aid to the devotions of the Duchess Blanche, wife of John of Gaunt, was an English rendering of a French original, composed by Guillaume de Guileville, and forming part of that poet's *Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*; and it may be reasonably supposed that among his "ballads, rondels, virelayes," few of which have come down to us, many were translations, or at any rate imitations, of poems composed on the other side of the Channel.

By importing this large French strain into the language Chaucer may be said to have decided the prolonged struggle which had been maintained since the Norman Conquest as to the subject matter and form of his art. For nearly two centuries, as we have already seen, Saxon and Norman traditions had striven for the mastery in English verse. The *Brut* of Layamon shows us that, so far back as the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Saxon minstrel was trying to adapt the themes of the Norman Geoffrey

Tyrwhitt's edition as occur in the notes to this History were made before the publication of Professor Skeat's edition.

[1] *Œuvres Complètes*, publiées par le Marquis de Queux de Saint Hilaire (1878), vol. ii. p. 138.

of Monmouth to the old alliterative measure of his race. After the middle of the same century Robert of Gloucester attempted to imitate the Alexandrine metre; while the *Hule and Nightingale*, together with the various poems of Richard Hampole, Robert Mannyng, and the author of the *Cursor Mundi*, illustrate the influence of the octosyllabic verse of four accents, used by Marie of France. The majority of these poets (Robert of Gloucester and the author of the *Hule and Nightingale* are exceptions) write in the Northern dialect, and furnish a proof that the superior refinement of French verse was felt in those parts of the island most remote from continental influence. A variation of the octosyllabic measure, the *rime couée*, was occasionally used as a vehicle for the innumerable romances which still gratified the popular taste. On the other hand a vigorous attempt had been made, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, in the north and the west, to preserve the alliterative form as a measure suitable to these favourite tales of chivalry. One of the alliterative romances, *The Green Knight*, seems to have been popular; and, as we have seen, Langland adopted the measure as the vehicle for his *Vision*. On the whole, however, alliteration steadily gave way before the attractions of rhyme, though some poets, like Minot, endeavoured, not without skill, to combine the advantages of the two systems in such stanzas as the following:—

Haly Gaste, thou gif him grace
  That he in gude time may begin,
And send to him both might and space
  His heritage well for to win;
  And sone assoyle him of his sin,
Hende God, that heried hell
  For France now es he entered in,
And there he dights him for to dwell.[1]

It is worthy of observation that the Northern poets, in proportion as they rely on the effects of alliteration in rhyming verse, pay little heed to regularity in the distri-

[1] Minot's *Poems* (Hall), p. 22.

bution of the accent, or in the number of the syllables. The following is a characteristic type of Minot's stanza :—

A lethern ladder · and a lang line,
A small bote was tharby · that put them *fro pyne*;
The folk that thai fand thaire · was faine for to fyne;
Sone thaire diner was dight · and there wold thai dine;
  There was thaire purpose · to dine and to dwell,
  For treson of the Franche men · that fals were and fell.[1]

It is easy to see that the loss of inflections, in the Northern dialect, favoured the triple movement which, as has been already remarked, is a pronounced feature in the old Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse.

Chaucer was no stranger to the art of his Northern predecessors. The speeches in one of his *Canterbury Tales* are given in the Northern dialect, and he had doubtless read all the rude masterpieces which had hitherto been produced in the English tongue. But in none of them did he find, either in respect of metre or rhythm, an instrument adequate for his aims. In the Prologue to the "Parson's Tale" he alludes somewhat contemptuously to alliterative verse,[2] while the lawless treatment of rhyming verse, by poets who had almost got rid of inflections, was displeasing to a fastidious ear which required the accent to be regularly distributed in lines measured by an equal number of syllables. Chaucer resolved, accordingly, to look exclusively to France for his metrical models. Not only did he conform the movement of the verse of four accents, much more strictly than had been hitherto the practice, to the French octosyllabic measure, but he introduced from France rhyming stanzas of various types, together with the rhyming couplet of five accents,[3] and composed "ballads, roundels, and virelayes," on the principles approved by the Provençals.

In order to carry out these metrical improvements,

[1] *Minot's Poems*, p. 35.

[2] But trusteth wel, I am a Southren man,
I can nat geste—rum, ram, ruf—by lettre,
Ne, God wot, rym holde I but litel bettre.

[3] He took this metre from Machault (Skeat, vi. p. 383), using it for the first time in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*.

Chaucer was almost necessarily forced to confine himself to the use of the iambic movement characteristic of French verse, and in this task he was greatly aided by the old Anglo-Saxon grammatical forms still preserved in the literature of the Southern dialect. The different vowel endings, formerly used to distinguish the declensions of nouns, had been swallowed up by the omnivorous *e*, which also remained to indicate the infinitive of verbs, the definite adjective, and the adverb. A striking, though an accidental, likeness accordingly existed between many English and French words, since in the latter language also the letter *e* survived as the representative of ancient forms of inflection in the parent Latin. In both tongues this vowel was so rapidly becoming mute, that an interesting question arises whether or not it was pronounced at the end and in the *cæsura* of an English verse, in words where it had a grammatical significance.

No positive answer can be returned to this question, for we cannot now be sure which was the stronger force, surviving grammatical usage, or the vocal tendency to the contraction of words. We know indeed that Chaucer wrote with strict regard to system both grammatical and metrical, and that he made correct use of the final *e* in versification whenever it suited his purpose to do so. On the other hand, the strong natural drift of pronunciation must have powerfully influenced him through his ear. The fact that the Northern dialect had lost almost all traces of inflection; the prevalence in French verse of masculine rhymes; the natural tendency in our own verse to discard double rhymes; all this, added to the uncertainty in the accentuation of words, observable in the writers of the period, exempts us at any rate from the necessity of believing that Chaucer's verse was disfigured by anything so displeasing to our modern sense of harmony as a series of feminine rhymes.[1]

[1] The question is ably discussed by Mr. Joseph Payne in *Essays on Chaucer* (Publications of Chaucer Society), iv. pp. 84-154. Strong arguments are forthcoming on both sides of the question; each reader may therefore follow the lead of his own taste.

In any case the models which Chaucer studied in his youth, and the success which attended his first effort to reduce his ideas to practice in his translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, furnished the English language with a new standard of versification which no poet could henceforth afford to disregard. A comparison of the following passage from this translation with any of the extracts previously made from the writings of Robert of Brunne or the *Cursor Mundi*, will show what a vast improvement had been effected by the genius of the new poet in the metrical vehicle of expression. Chaucer is describing the allegorical figure of Eld:—

The tyme that may not sojourne,
But goth, and never may retourne,
As water that doun renneth ay
But never drope retourne may;
There may no-thing as tyme endure,
Metal, nor erthely creature;
For alle thing it fret and shal;
The tyme eek that chaungeth al,
And al doth wax and fostred be,
And alle thing destroyeth he:
The tyme that eldeth our ancestours,
And eldeth kinges and emperours,
And that us alle shall overcomen
Er that deeth us shal have nomen:
The tyme, that hath al in welde,
To elden folk, had maad her elde
[illegible]

More than a child of two yeer olde.
But natheles I trowe that she
Was *fair sum-tyme*, and *fresh to see*,
Whan she was in hir rightful age:
But she was past al that passage,
And was a doted thing bicomen.
A furred cope on had she nomen,
Wel had she clad hir-self and warm,
For colde might els doon hir harm
These olde folkes have alway colde;
Hir kind is swiche whan they ben olde.

Chaucer's translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose* is not remarkable only as making a landmark in the refinement of our versification. It marks with equal significance the rise of a new spirit in English poetry, the importation of thoughts and themes from the Continent, announcing the approach of the Renaissance. Hitherto the subjects of English verse composition had been chosen almost exclusively for the gratification of two classes of readers, concentrated in the monastery and the castle. Since the days of Dunstan monasticism, as we have seen, had laid a heavy hand on the Saxon imagination, and the homilies of Ælfric, the devotional treatise in verse of Richard Hampole, the tales of Robert Mannyng and the author of the *Cursor Mundi*, even the allegory of Langland, prove how powerfully this ideal of life had affected the spirit of the people. Almost the sole opposing note is heard in the curious poem, *The Hule and the Nightingale;* but the rising opposition of the laity to the dominant mode of ecclesiastical thought takes form and body in the poetry of Chaucer, whose genius is almost as hostile to the monastic element, as that of Boccaccio or John de Meung. In his Canterbury Pilgrimage, he has revealed to us, after his own dramatic manner, the dislike with which he and a large number of his countrymen regarded the educational discipline of the cloister. The Monk is there made, with admirable propriety, to entertain the pilgrims with moral tales of the kind which were commonly told at the convent refectory. After the company have listened with singular patience to a considerable number of these edifying stories, the narrator is at last somewhat abruptly stopped by the Knight, who confesses to his own weariness, and who is eagerly supported by the Host, Harry Bailly, in the following characteristic criticism :—

> Sire Monk, namoore of this, so God yow blesse!
> Youre tale anoyeth all this compaignye;
> Swich talkyng is nat worth a boterflye,
> For thereinne is ther no desport ne game.
> Wherefor, sire Monk, daun Piers by youre name,

I pray yow hertely telle us somewhat elles,
For sikerly nere clinking of youre belles,[1]
That on youre bridal hang on every syde,
By hevene Kyng, that for us alle dyde!
I sholde er this han fallen doun for slepe,
Althogh the slough had never been so deepe;
Thanne had youre tale al be toold in veyn,
For certeinly, as that thise clerkes seyn,
Whereas a man may have noon audience,
Noght helpeth it to tellen his sentence;
And wel I wot the substance is in me,
If any thing shal wel reported be
Sir, sey somewhat of huntyng, I yow preye.

Chaucer lets us see very plainly that the discredit into which the monkish orders had fallen had reacted on the entire system of encyclopædic culture, and that a large part of society, mainly consisting of the land-owning and trading classes, were beginning to form conceptions of life and art distinct from the ideas presented to them in the monastic models of the Church.

An equally dramatic proof of the change in taste among the same influential classes, as regards romance, is furnished by the criticism on the tale of "Sir Thopas." Stories of this kind had been listened to with pleasure by the rude ancestors of the pilgrims when sung to them by the minstrels at meal-times, and still found favour with the people at large, who would collect on village greens, in the high roads, and at the approaches to bridges, while the wandering singer chanted in endless rhymes the feats of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton. But in the fastidious host of the Tabard such conventional art moved no other feeling than disgust:

"*Na moore of this, for Goddes dignitee!*"
Quod oure Hoste, "for thou makest me
So wery of thy verray lewednesse
That, also wisly God my soule blesse,
Min eres aken of thy drasty speche.
Now swich a rym the devel I beteche!
This may wel be rym dogerel," *quod he*.

. . . .

[1] For surely if it were not for the clinking of your bells.

"Thou doost noght elles but despendest tyme;
Sire, at o word, thou shalt no lenger ryme.
Lat se wher thou kanst tellen aught in geeste,
Or telle in prose somewhat, at the leeste,
In which ther be som murthe, or som doctryne."

Here we see the germs of literary criticism. It is plain that the days of oral minstrelsy are numbered. The rude recitals of the adventures of Paladins and knights-errant, the successors of the ancient tribal chiefs, are already becoming unpalatable to men who have tasted the refinements and luxuries of civil life. A conception of nature and human society, larger than those with which their insular traditions had hitherto made them familiar, began to form itself in the minds of Englishmen. Ideas of philosophy, rhetoric, satire, made their way to them from the Continent. They saw with admiration the successful attempts of the poets of France and Italy to express their thoughts with precision in their native language, and they were ambitious of tuning their own speech by the same literary standards. Translation was the channel by which it was necessary to unite English with continental thought; Chaucer's was the genius which effected the junction by an English rendering of a poem so widely popular as the *Roman de la Rose*. Of the influence exercised on his imagination by this poem constant traces may be found in almost every one of his later compositions. The *Romance of the Rose*, moreover, inspired him to study and translate Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, a book which not only equipped him with a large part of his philosophy of life, but also contributed in no slight degree to his poetical development. The final fruits of this long and patient commerce with other men's minds reveal themselves in that later stage of translation represented in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

To call this work a "translation," in the strictly literal sense of the word, would be a mistake.[1] The

[1] The curious reader should consult Mr. W. M. Rossetti's very careful collation of the texts of the *Filostrato* and *Troilus and Criseyde* (Publications of the Chaucer Society, 1873).

poem contains 8246 lines, and of these 2583 are translated from Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, but the rest are Chaucer's own. Moreover the whole conception and treatment of the subject by Chaucer are in marked contrast to the method of Boccaccio; and these facts may throw light on certain features in *Troilus and Criseyde* which have greatly perplexed the commentators.

For it is undoubtedly remarkable that, while Chaucer owes so much to the Italian poet, he nowhere acknowledges his debt to him, but on the contrary leads the reader to believe that he is following an old Latin author named Lollius. This is a deliberate mystification, for he ascribes to Lollius a sonnet which he has translated directly from Petrarch.[1] Chaucer's reason for the selection of the name Lollius is not certainly known, but it has been suggested, with equal ingenuity and probability, that he was misled, by a confused recollection of a line of Horace, to suppose Lollius to have been a historian of the Trojan war.[2] As to his reason for the suppression of Boccaccio's name, however, I entertain very little doubt, and believe it to have been essentially connected with his design in writing *Troilus and Criseyde*.

It would appear that the poem was composed between the years 1379 and 1383, that is to say, after Chaucer's second visit to Italy, when he was doubtless master of the Italian language. The course of the narrative, as I have said, follows for the most part the well-known lines marked out by Boccaccio. Nevertheless *Troilus and Criseyde* hinges on an idea quite different from that of the *Filostrato*[3] We know from the author of the latter work

[1] *Troilus and Criseyde*, bk. i. 394. Compare Petrarch, Sonnet 88 In *Queen Annelida and False Arcite* he pretends to be following a Latin poet, Corinne; yet he is translating from the *Teseide*.

[2] "Trojani belli scriptorem, maxime Lolli."—Horace, *Epist* i 2 1 This happy suggestion was made by Dr. G. Latham in the *Athenæum*, 3rd October 1868

[3] "Nelle quali se avviene che leggiate quante volte Troilo piangere e dolerse della partita di Griseida troverete, tante apertamente potrete comprendere e conoscere le mie medesime voci, le lagrime, i sospiri e l' angosce, e quante volte le bellezze, i costumi e qualunque altra cosa laudevole in donna, di Griseida scritto troverete, di voi essere parlato potrete intendere"—Boccaccio's Preface to his *Filostrato*.

that the theme was chosen as a means of expressing his own feelings during his absence from his mistress. Its main motive is therefore of a lyrical nature, and indeed throughout it Troilus appears as the prominent character; the charms of Cressida are insisted on mainly to heighten the idea of her lover's sufferings at parting from her; and her treachery to him is related almost without comment, as if it were something quite in the ordinary course of nature. Chaucer, on the other hand—and in this he gave perhaps the first proof of his own strong native bent—was struck with the dramatic points of the story; and, with his mind still full of the *Romance of the Rose*, he designed, in the first place, to give a poetical representation of woman's fickleness in love. For this purpose he heightened the character of Troilus, making him much more manly and heroic than he appears in the *Filostrato;* he divided the interest of the story between the hero and the heroine, dwelling in detail on the gradations of feeling through which Cressida passed; and he brought into such prominence the character of Pandarus, that Shakespeare had afterwards merely to fill in the dramatic outline Chaucer had sketched. Not finding in Boccaccio's treatment of the story all the materials he needed, Chaucer turned to other sources, and borrowed numerous incidents and touches of a highly dramatic kind from the *Historia Trojana* of Guido delle Colonne. Finally, in order to give the moral atmosphere to the tale, which both his conception and the ideas of his time required, he had recourse to Boethius, and transferred many of that author's reflections into his poem to emphasise the different stages of the action.

Something, however, still remained to be done. Chaucer had produced by judicious combinations an admirably artistic story; but, according to all contemporary rules of art, it was necessary for him to show that his moral example was founded on good historical *authority;* and this was the more needful under the circumstances, because the character of Cressida was

contrary to the chivalrous conception of the immaculate virtue of women. The name of Boccaccio, even if it had not provoked the censure of the Church, would have carried no historical weight; the history of Guido delle Colonne lacked antiquity; while the narrative of Dares the Phrygian, in which Benoît de Sainte More and Guido laid their foundations, could not be cited for any particulars about the loves of Troilus and Cressida. Chaucer had therefore to create for his imaginary history an equally imaginary historian, and this he did by citing the "Latin" of the supposed Trojan historian Lollius.[1]

The poetical structure which Chaucer built on these foundations is a fine example of the character of his genius, at once flexible and inventive. *Troilus and Criseyde* reveals the influence on his mind of all the great intellectual forces of the period: Catholicism, Feudalism, Democracy, and the Renaissance. The interest of the poem is concentrated in the development of the character of Cressida. In the first three books Cressida's conduct is regulated in strict conformity with the standing rules of chivalrous society. She resists her own inclinations, and withstands the solicitations of Pandarus on behalf of Troilus, with all the oppositions of argument required by the science of the troubadours and the regulations of the Courts of Love. André le Chapelain himself could have found no fault with her behaviour. When she finally surrenders to Troilus, she has as yet been guilty of no offence according to the moral code of the time, which merely required her to be true and steadfast in her attachment to one preferred lover. Of all this refined casuistry and analysis there is no trace whatever in the Cressida of Boccaccio, who represents his heroine simply as a young widow in love. At the same time, while preserving the chivalrous standard, Chaucer, with extraordinary skill, by associating Cressida

[1] For-why to every lovere I me excuse
That of no sentement I this endyte,
But out of Latyn in my tonge it wryte
T. and C bk. ii. 14.

with the semi-comic character of Pandarus, who plays the same part in his story as afterwards in Shakespeare's play, removed the heroine's character from the metaphysical region of chivalrous love, and reduced it to a human and almost a *bourgeois* level. It is not till the fourth book that the deterioration of Cressida's nature reveals itself incidentally, in the facility with which she listens, without displeasure though without response, to the artful love-making of Diomede. Even then she is not at once entirely false to the requirements of chivalrous love. When Diomede visits her in her tent, and speaks to her of love, Boccaccio makes her refuse him in such a way as to encourage him to speak further; but in Chaucer, even while she encourages her new lover, she shows that she has still a sense of what is due to her sex:

> And that doth me to han so grete a wonder
> *That ye wol scornen any womman so;*
> Ek, God woot, love and I ben fer asonder,
> I am disposed bet, so mot I go
> Unto my deth, to pleyne and maken wo;
> *What I shal efter done I kan not seye,*
> *But trewelich as yet me list not pleye.*

It was doubtless this remarkable dramatic skill, joined to a half-compassionate vein of theological reflection in excuse of Cressida, which afterwards brought Chaucer into difficulties with his female critics, and forced him to the recantation and penance we shall find recorded in the Prologue to his *Legend of Good Women.*

In the meantime we may observe, from his treatment of the story, how much his many-sided genius owed to his labours of translation. From the portion of the *Roman de la Rose* which was the production of Guillaume de Lorris he took that element in his poem which reflects the spirit of the Courts of Love; the work of John de Meung, full of the spirit of democratic revolt and iconoclasm, inspired the conception of Pandarus; Boccaccio, on the other hand, imbued with the rising genius of the Renaissance, showed him how to animate with human interest and modern feeling the stories of the ancient world.

When we turn from these translations to his original work, we can trace, step by step, his painful ascent from humble efforts of imitation, up to that final monument of invention, the *Canterbury Tales*, which justly entitles him to a place among the great poets of the world.

2. On the threshold of his poetical work stand a group of compositions which bear a certain family likeness to each other in matter, and also exhibit a common method of treatment. These are the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Parlement of Foules*, the *House of Fame*, and the *Legend of Good Women*. All of them are connected, in a greater or less degree, with that idea of love which is handled in the first part of the *Romance of the Rose*, and in all of them the allegorical form of composition is employed. Moreover, in three of them at least, Chaucer has formed his design in the same manner; that is to say, he has borrowed his leading ideas from other authors, but has made them his own, by placing them in a context which redeems them from the reproach of being mere plagiarisms. His inventions are not always very felicitous, but still, as far as they go, they are original.

The *Book of the Duchess* is an elegy on Blanche, first wife of John of Gaunt, who died in 1369 Chaucer was at the time a member of the king's household, and therefore, doubtless, in constant communication with the duke, whose influence predominated in the closing years of Edward III.'s reign. The poet's manly genius was little qualified for the hypocrisies of courtly verse, but his position perhaps made the tribute of some poetical compliment indispensable. Meditating on the form in which he should convey his sympathy, he found a suggestion in a composition of Guillaume de Machault, the most fashionable French poet of the fourteenth century, whose verses must of course have been familiar to court circles in England. Machault was the lineal poetical descendant of Guillaume de Lorris, and in many dreams, visions, and allegories, had reproduced, with an added insipidity, the meaningless metaphysic and faded elegance of his ancestor. Among them was a poem called *Le Dit*

de la Fontaine Amoureuse, of which his latest editor, P. Tarbé, gives the following account:—

"The poet on waking hears a dolorous voice singing the pains of love; he seizes his pen, and hastens to write down the tender complaint recited by it. This includes among other things the story of Ceyx and Alcyone. At the end of it Machault goes to look for the author, and the latter informs him that he has merely worked by order of his lord, whose homage is proudly repulsed by a lady. Both go to look for this noble and unfortunate lover. He was a nobleman handsome and agreeable, and like a king's son; he conducts Machault into a pleasant thicket, where is a magnificent crystal fountain with bas-reliefs representing the story of Narcissus, and Helen being carried off by Paris. They sit down, and Machault receives the confidences of his new friend. They go to sleep, doubtless so as to allow Venus to appear to them in a dream, who, after having told them the story of the judgment of Paris, promises her protection to the young lord, and calls up before his eyes a graceful shadow, which is that of his mistress, who smiles upon him, holds sweet converse with him, and leaves him full of hope."[1]

That Chaucer had read this poem (which was so popular that the poet tells us he had to divide his MS. to satisfy the impatience of his readers) is plain; that he derived from it the suggestion of the *Book of the Duchess* is I think scarcely less doubtful, although he only used it after the manner of an original inventor for the framing of his own plot, which is as follows:—In the opening lines he announces that he is a bad sleeper, and he goes on to say that on one occasion, to beguile his sleepless hours, he read the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, wherein the mention of Morpheus had such an effect upon him that he fell asleep. While sleeping he dreamed that he was lying in a chamber painted in illustration of

[1] Œuvres de Machault, pp. xx., xxi. This edition contains a notice of Machault's life. The relations of the poet with Agnes of Navarre furnish a most curious and interesting illustration of the manners of the time. See pp. xiv.-xx.

the *Romaunt of the Rose*, and that he heard the noise of horses and hounds. Going out to see what it was, he found that the Emperor Octavian was hunting; and while he was watching the chase, a "whelp" came up to him and enticed him into a forest, where he found a goodly knight sitting on the ground and uttering a doleful song, in which he complained that his lady was dead. The knight becoming aware of Chaucer's presence, the latter makes an apology for his intrusion, which the other courteously accepts, and after a very long description of the extent of his sorrow, goes on to unfold the cause of it in extremely enigmatical terms. Fortune, he says, has played at chess with him, and has taken his best piece. Chaucer, understanding him literally, observes, not unreasonably, that this is scarcely a sufficient ground for meditating suicide, as the knight seems to do, after the example of a number of persons in ancient history whom he enumerates. The other thereupon explains, by telling a long story about his love and the innumerable perfections of his lady. When he has done, Chaucer, whose tact in the adventure does not shine, asks where the lady is, and the knight, no doubt seeing that allegory is little suited to the comprehension of his hearer, tells him plainly, "She is dedde." Then the poet awakes and finds it is a dream

A distinguished English scholar has been moved to undertake Chaucer's defence against the strictures passed on this poem by a French critic; he finds it graceful and pathetic.[1] I confess that it seems to me few readers, who judge the composition apart from Chaucer's prestige, are likely to share his opinion. The design, as described above, is singularly barren of genuine invention. Simple as it is, the action is clumsily conducted, for the knight acquaints the reader from the first with his lady's death, thus spoiling what might have been a dramatic climax, if the fact had been withheld till after the recital of all her amiable qualities. Nor is the crudeness of the general conception relieved by any remarkable beauties of detail.

[1] See Professor A. W. Ward, *Chaucer* (Men of Letters Series), p. 72.

The story serves to piece together a certain number of "purple patches," taken from various poems which the author has read and admired; but these do not seem to be in any way necessarily connected with the central thought. It would, in fact, be as exacting to look for pathos in a poem of this order, as in Spenser's *Astrophel*, or in the pastoral elegies described in the 30th number of the *Guardian*. The mourning is of that conventional kind which is prescribed for a conventional class of poetry, and, owing to a certain lack of skill, the composition fails to attain a high place even in that lowly sphere.

But though the *Book of the Duchess* cannot be esteemed highly as a work of poetical art, it is of singular interest as marking a stage in Chaucer's own poetical progress. It shows us that his earliest method of composition was to elaborate a central idea on the lines suggested to him by a contemporary poet, and to support and embellish this with subsidiary ideas derived from other literary sources. The story of Ceyx and Alcyone is translated from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, xi. 472-572, but it contains touches borrowed from the *Dit de la Fontaine Amoureuse*. The latter poem also furnishes him with the description of the knight's lost lady (vv. 805-830). From another poem of Machault's, *Remède de la Fortune*, he takes the picture of Fortune (vv. 634 *et seq.*); while the idea of the game of chess played with that goddess comes from the *Roman de la Rose* (v. 618 etc., compare *R. R.* v. 6644). These are but a few instances of the manner in which Chaucer in this poem has availed himself of other men's labours for the decoration of his own design.[1]

The same method is adopted in the *Parlement of Foules*, a complimentary poem composed for a more joyful occasion, viz. the betrothal of Richard II. of England to Anne of Bohemia in 1381. Here again the source of inspiration may plainly be traced to a French original. For the foundation of Chaucer's poem is indicated by its name, and the incident to which this

[1] For other examples see Professor Skeat's notes to the *Book of the Duchess* in his edition of the Minor Poems, pp. 234-272.

points is found in the fabliau, *Hueline et Eglantine*, which records how two ladies disputed which of them had the more courteous lover, one being loved by a knight, the other by a clerk. They agree to refer the decision to the Court of Love, and the following account of their proceedings is given by Legrand d'Aussy in his abstract of the *fabliau* :—

"The god is reclining on a bed of roses, in a room of which the walls are hung with bows and arrows. On the arrival of the ladies he rises and salutes them, and, taking them by the hand, seats them at his side. Having been informed of the object of their visit, he assembles the barons of his court, which is, singularly enough, composed only of birds: and he proposes to them the great question of the two lovers. The falcon, the sparrow-hawk, the jay, the magpie, and to use La Fontaine's phrase *tous les gens querelleurs*, even the cuckoo of evil omen, declare themselves loudly for the knights, and maintain that they are the most courteous. The wren, the pigeon, the lark with his fine crest, and the goldfinch with his scarlet plumage, take the part of the clerks."[1]

The question is finally decided by a combat between the nightingale, as champion for the clerks, and the parrot, who represents the knights, and in this the latter is decisively vanquished

But while he thus borrowed a central idea, Chaucer had still to get it into shape for his particular purpose. His first step was to frame it in the orthodox dream-setting. For this he betook himself to the head-source of all such compositions, namely the *Somnium Scipionis*, and feigned that during the day he had been reading the work of Macrobius, of which he gives an abstract. As in the *Book of the Duchess* reading about Morpheus had caused him to fall asleep, so now, through reading about Africanus, the image of that hero appeared to him in a dream, and brought him to a gate in a park wall, over which he saw two inscriptions, suggested to him by his recollection of Dante's *Inferno*. Africanus takes him

[1] Legrand d'Aussy, *Fabliaux*, i 311-12.

into the park, just as Virgil guides Dante into hell; and, once within the gates, he gives a list of all the trees he beholds, in imitation of Boccaccio (*Teseide*, xi. st. 22-24), and Guillaume de Lorris (*Roman de la Rose*, 1361), who had themselves imitated Statius (*Thebais*, vi. 98). He then proceeds to describe a garden he saw; the description, however, is not taken from the French poem that suggested his original idea, but from Boccaccio's *Teseide* (canto vii. st. 51-60; 63-66; 61-62). In this delightful spot he finds the Goddess Nature, surrounded by birds who have come to choose their mates, for it is St. Valentine's Day, and the imagery of all this portion of the poem is largely derived from the *De Planctu Naturæ* of Alanus de Insulis, though the idea of the council of birds is taken from *Hueline et Eglantine*. The rest of the action is Chaucer's own invention. Nature carries on her wrist a "formell egle," who is wooed before the assembled birds by three "tercell egles"; the parliament of fowls discuss the case, and, after listening to their various proposals, the formell eagle announces that she will make known her choice at the end of a year. The allegory signifies that the Princess of Bohemia received offers of marriage from the Prince of Bavaria and the Margrave of Meissen, as well as from Richard, and that the negotiations for her betrothal to the latter lasted for twelve months.[1]

The *Parlement of Foules* shows a great advance in poetical skill on the *Book of the Duchess*. Though so many ideas are borrowed, they are worked into the texture of the poem with much skill; the allegory is extremely ingenious; and the descriptions of the birds and of their conversation are given with the vivacity of a fancy evidently delighted with the humours of the Bestiary.

The *House of Fame* differs from the two allegories just mentioned in not having been composed for a particular occasion. It resembles them, however, in the literary source of its inspiration. We see at once, from the poem itself, that the author wishes to present a moral and metaphysical view of the world in emulation of

[1] On this point see Ward, *Chaucer* (Men of Letters Series), p. 86.

Dante; and this judgment is confirmed by the external evidence of Lydgate, Chaucer's disciple, who, when giving in his Prologue to the *Fall of Princes*, an authentic list of his master's writings, refers to the *House of Fame* under the title of *Dant in English*. From Dante Chaucer borrowed his chief "machine" for the conduct of the action of his poem;[1] details of ideal scenery;[2] mythological allusions;[3] to say nothing of mistakes founded either on the reproduction of his author's errors, or on the misinterpretation of his meaning.[4] But, as in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parlement of Foules*, the motive of the poem, though borrowed, is altered and modified so as to form the ground-work of an original conception.

The *House of Fame* is divided into three books, and, like the rest of Chaucer's poems of this kind, is thrown into the form of a dream. We have to listen at the opening to a long dissertation on the nature of dreams, and are then told of a particular dream which the poet had on the 10th of December, probably, as it was on a Thursday, in the year 1383.[5] He finds himself in his dream inside the temple of Venus, which is painted throughout with scenes from the *Æneid*, and these are described at such length that the entire first book is occupied with an abstract of Virgil's poem. On leaving the temple he tells us that he was suddenly seized upon by an eagle and carried up among the stars; and the second book relates his conversation with the eagle concerning the various natural phenomena they encountered in their flight. Deposited at last in the region where the House of Fame is situated, the poet observes that it is built on a

[1] Chaucer, *House of Fame*, bk. i. 500 Dante, *Purgatorio*, ix. 19.

[2] Chaucer, *House of Fame*, i. 488 Dante, *Inferno*, i. 64, xiv. 8 Chaucer, *House of Fame*, 1130. Dante, *Purgatorio*, iii. 47.

[3] Compare references in *House of Fame* to Phaethon (942), and Icarus [illegible]

[illegible] Chaucer [illegible] of Dante, [illegible] this whole [illegible] viii.)

huge rock of ice, one face of which is always melting under the influence of the sun's rays, while the other preserves immutably the names inscribed upon it. He then describes the inside of the temple, the person of the goddess, who is seated in it, and the great pillars which bear up the roof, each of which is formed by the famous work of some poet or historian. Among these are the History of the Fall of Jerusalem by Josephus; the Story of Troy as told by Homer, Dares, Lollius, Guido delle Colonne, and Géoffrey of Monmouth; the Wars of Cæsar and Pompey by Lucan; together with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Statius' *Thebais*, and Claudian's *Rape of Proserpine*. The poet sees various companies of men coming into the temple with different requests to the goddess, who makes her award according to her arbitrary caprice, and by the mouth of her representative, the god Æolus; the respective judgments being announced by the sound of two trumpets, Laud and Slander. Going out of the temple the traveller sees his eagle sitting on a rock, and is carried by him into a building called the House of Dædalus, where he watches the meeting of all kinds of rumours, and observes how Truth and Falsehood mingle and struggle together to get passage into the world. After this, he says,

House of Fame does not lie in any fundamental conception of Dante's, but in Ovid's famous and splendid description of the abode of that goddess, in the twelfth book of the *Metamorphoses*:—

Orbe locus medio est inter terrasque fretumque
Cælestesque plagas, triplicis confinia mundi:
Unde quod est usquam, quamvis regionibus absit,
Inspicitur, penetratque cavas vox omnis ad aures.
Fama tenet, summaque domum sibi legit in arce:
Innumerosque aditus ac mille foramina tectis
Addidit, et nullis inclusit limina portis.
Nocte dieque patent. Tota est ex ære sonanti;
Tota fremit, vocesque refert, iteratque quod audit.
Nulla quies intus, nullaque silentia parte.
Nec tamen est clamor, sed parvæ murmura vocis:
Qualia de pelagi, si quis procul audiat, undis
Esse solent. qualemve sonum, cum Jupiter atras
Increpuit nubes, extrema tonitrua reddunt
Atria turba tenet: veniunt leve vulgus, euntque:
Mixtaque cum veris passim commenta vagantur
Millia rumorum, confusaque verba volutant.
E quibus hi vacuas implent sermonibus aures:
Hi narrata ferunt alio. mensuraque ficti
Crescit et auditis aliquid novus adjicit auctor.
Illic Credulitas, illic temerarius Error,
Vanaque Lætitia est, consternatique Timores,
Seditioque repens, dubioque auctore Susurri.
Ipsa quid in cœlo rerum pelagoque geratur
Et tellure videt, totumque inquirit in orbem.

Having appropriated Ovid's allegory, Chaucer's next business is to prove, after the fashion of the Schoolmen, and by the example of Dante, that it is a reasonable one. For this purpose he, in the first place, makes use of an eagle, the symbol of soaring contemplation, who performs for him the same service as Beatrice, or Theology, performs for Dante, by explaining the physical phenomena witnessed in their heavenly journey. This learned fowl proves to the poet, by the theory of sound, that the slightest murmur of earth must mount through the air to the House of Fame, and, as they soar through the heaven, Chaucer notes, after the manner of Dante, how true had been the physical and metaphysical observations of his

authorities, Plato,[1] Boethius,[2] Martianus Capella, and Alanus de Insulis.[3] Arrived at his celestial goal, he breaks up Ovid's fiction, and distributes the various details through an allegory of his own invention, but for the composition of which he is largely indebted to preceding poets, like Dante and Machault, and to encyclopædic authors, like Vincent de Beauvais.

In following this line of invention Chaucer shows great liveliness and originality of thought, but at the same time a lack of that complete mastery over his art to which he afterwards attained. The *House of Fame* stands at an immeasurable distance below the *Divine Comedy*. One of the main beauties in Dante's design is the perfect balance between its philosophy and its poetry. By distributing the abodes of the blessed through the nine spheres of the planetary system, he conformed his imaginative conception to what was then believed to be scientific truth, so that every known or supposed law of physics is represented in him as having its counterpart in some analogous form of spiritual existence. Moreover, by completing his journey to the very centre of being, he brought his poem to a natural and appropriate goal. Chaucer, on the other hand, uses his scientific knowledge in support of a mere fiction of his own, and hence, in his *House of Fame*, there is an absence of that sublime and solemn air of reality which is required for a description of the unseen world. As he left his work unfinished, we may suppose that he had passed judgment on his own design: it is indeed obvious that

1 For in this regioun certein
Dwelleth many a citizein
Of which that speketh Dan Plato.—*H. F.* 929.

2 And tho thoughte I upon Boece
That writ "a thought may flee so hye
With fetheres of Philosophye
To passen everich element."—*H. F.* 972.

3 And than thoughte I on Marcian
And eek on Anteclaudian,
That sooth was her descripcioun
Of al the hevenes regioun,
As far as that I saw the preve;
Therefor I can hem now beleve.—*H. F.* 985.

he could not have conducted the action to any satisfactory artistic conclusion.

The *House of Fame* is interesting, apart from its poetical merits, as giving a personal glimpse of Chaucer himself. The following passage shows us how he employed his leisure, after finishing his daily official work in the Customs:—

> Wherefore as I said ywis
> Jupiter considreth well this,
> And also, beausire, of other things,
> That is, thou haste no tidings
> Of Loves folks, if they be glad,
> Ne of nothing else that God made;
> And not onely fro ferre contree
> That no tidyngs comen to the,
> But of thy very neighebores
> That dwellen almost at thy very dores,
> Thou hearest neither that ne this,
> For whan thy labour al done is,
> And hast made al thy rekenings,
> In stead of rest and of new things,
> Thou goest home to thin house anon,
> And also dombe as a stone,
> Thou sittest at another boke,
> Til fully dased is thy loke,
> And livest thus as an heremite,
> Although thin abstinence is lite.[1]

It would seem not improbable that, in the lines in which he is first addressed by the eagle, there is an allusion to his wife; and if this be so, some light would be thrown on the poet's frequent and uncomplimentary references to marriage:—

> Thus I long in his clawes lay,
> Til at the last he to me spake
> In mannes voice and said "Awake,
> And be not agast so for shame,"
> And called me tho by my name,
> And for I should better abrayde
> Me to awake, thus he sayde,

[1] The same characteristic is recorded in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*:—

> And as for me though that I can but lite,
> On bokes for to rede I me delite,
> And to hem yeve I faith and ful credence
> And in min herte have hem in reverence
> So hertely that ther is game none
> That fro my bokes maketh me to gone.

Right in the same voice and stevin
That useth one that I could nevin;[1]
And with that voice, sooth to saine,
My mind came to me again,
For it was goodly said to me,
So nas it never wont to be.

The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* is a poem with a twofold interest, partly from its illustration of the nature of Chaucer's genius, partly as reflecting the conflict of spiritual forces at work within the heart of the Feudal System. Composed about the year 1384, it is plainly connected with the poet's early translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose* and the *Filostrato;* it contains a recantation of the heresies encouraged by those works; and it reveals the kind of influence which affected Chaucer in his capacity of Court Poet. The poem opens with a reference to the writer's studious and literary disposition, which, says he, is unchangeable except in the month of May, when he is in the habit of going out into the fields for the enjoyment of nature generally, and more particularly for the worship of his beloved flower, the daisy. On one occasion, having set out to watch the flower closing in the evening, he ordered his couch to be made in an arbour, that he might rise in good time to see the petals opening with the day; and while he was sleeping in his arbour, as usual he dreamed. In his dream he saw the god of Love enter with a great company of women, all of whom, since the days of Adam, had been Love's true servants, and chief among whom was a noble Queen, afterwards declared to be the Greek Alcestis. The god, surveying the poet, sternly asked him by what right he was found in the neighbourhood of his flower, though he was well known as a heretic and a rebel:—

For in plain text, withouten nede of glose,
Thou hast translated the Romaunt of the Rose,
That is an heresie against my law,
And makest wise folke to withdraw,
And of Creseide thou hast said as the list,
That maketh men to women lesse trist.

[1] Name.

The Queen, however, intercedes in his behalf, and cites, in lines already quoted, the various poems in which he has propagated through the country the true faith of Love. As for the particular offences charged against him, she undertakes that he shall not repeat them:—

> He shal never more agulten in this wyse,
> But shal maken as ye wol devyse
> Of women trewe in loving all her life,
> When so ye woll of maiden or of wife,
> And forthren you as much as he misseide,
> Or in the Rose, or elles in Creseide.

Mollified by the Queen's gracious intercession, the god signifies his intention of pardoning the poet, who acknowledges his goodness with grateful humility, but, with that curious want of tact which he humorously assigns to himself in his dreams, proceeds to enter upon his own defence:—

> Ne a true lover ought me not to blame,
> For that I spake a false lover some shame.
> They oughte rather with me for to hold,
> For that I of Creseide wrote or told,
> Or of the Rose, what so mine author ment,
> Algate God wotte it was mine entent
> To forthren trewth in love and it cherise,
> And to ben ware fro falsnesse and fro vice,
> By which ensample this was my meaning

His more judicious advocate abruptly cuts him short in this defence, and appoints him, as a penance, to tell a certain number of stories, at fixed intervals of time, illustrating the manner in which the love of women has been betrayed by men:—

> And whan this boke is made yeve it the quene,
> In my behalf, at Eltham or at Sheen.

I think the foregoing account of this poem will make the motive of its composition perfectly plain. Times had greatly changed since the troubadours, with lyrical enthusiasm, the Courts of Love, with judicial edicts, André le Chapelain, with dialogues in prose, and Guillaume de Lorris, with allegories in verse, had codified the rules of amorous behaviour in chivalrous society. It is evident

that the satire of John de Meung, highly popular among the middle classes, had produced a profound impression upon the chiefs of feudalism, knightly, clerical, and above all feminine. They perceived that its democratic principles threatened the whole hierarchy of chivalry, and they determined by all the means in their power to stem the tide of obnoxious opinion. The *Legend of Good Women* is among the first fruits of the counter movement, which reached its height in the beginning of the next century, when Christine de Pisan and the famous Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, combined their forces in an onslaught on the mingled impiety and indecency of John de Meung's work. In England the leader of the ladies was no less a person than the good Queen Anne of Bohemia, wife of Richard II., and her influence was brought to bear on the poet whose genius had helped to popularise the heresies contained in the *Romaunt of the Rose* and in the *Filostrato*.[1] Chaucer's prominent position in court circles left him peculiarly open to such an attack, and, unlike some other professors of heresy, he was not desirous of martyrdom. Though his own sympathies were evidently with the rising tide of middle-class opinion, he gave an undertaking, in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, to maintain the orthodox tradition of Guillaume de Lorris. He makes his defence very adroitly, partly in his own person, by pleading (though his plea is set aside), that his two poems were only faithful translations, and partly by securing the favour of the queen,—for we can hardly doubt that she is the person allegorised in the character of Alcestis,—with the exquisite refinement of his flattery; thus securing her approval of his orthodox principles, illustrated in those of his compositions to which she particularly refers.

3. Skilful as Chaucer had shown himself in the mere technical use of his art, he had as yet given no proof that

[1] We know from Lydgate, Prologue to the *Fall of Princes*, that the *Legend of Good Women* was written at the request of the queen.

> This poete wrote at the request of the quene
> A legende, of perfite holynesse,
> Of good women.

he possessed great powers of original invention. All that he had done was the work of a clever translator, an ingenious imitator. He had shown that the French system of harmony could be naturalised in the English language. He had reproduced, with more or less happiness, on this newly-formed instrument, the strains of allegorical poetry that found favour in the courtly circles of French minstrelsy; and, in emulation of Dante, he had attempted to present a bird's-eye view of the spiritual world, in the form suggested to him by his school learning. But in these compositions he had followed the lines of art marked out by the allegorical poets allied to the Provençal School, and it is easy to perceive that he was working under conditions not altogether favourable to his genius. His thoughts are strained and artificial, and wanting in the human sympathy and interest which is an indispensable element in all great poetry. Only in one poem, in which he departed from the models furnished by the troubadours, had he advanced with the confident step of an original inventor. *Troilus and Criseyde* doubtless revealed to him the true nature of his genius; and in this direction he sought for the future the path of his development. The *Canterbury Tales* are the full harvest of the art of the trouvère.

The trouvère was the lineal literary descendant of the tribal gleeman, whose business it had been to amuse or flatter his lord by enlivening his meals with story-telling. Originally his tales were doubtless almost invariably of a genealogical character, like the legend of *Beowulf*; afterwards, as taste became more refined and exacting, the bard, while still relying on his poetry with its musical accompaniment, began to vary his oral entertainment with the arts of mimicry and juggling. The careful reader of the *Canterbury Tales* will constantly observe traces of the oral style of narrative,[1] and will infer from such, not only

[1] We see from the closing stanzas of *Troilus and Criseyde* that this poem was intended equally for recitation and reading:—

Go litel booke . . .

So prey I to God that none misse-write thee,
Ne thee misse metre for defaute of tunge,
And redde wher' so thou be or elles songe, etc.

that Chaucer has adopted this style in order to produce a dramatic effect, but that he has preserved the arts which were actually employed by oral story-tellers for keeping up the attention of an audience. Among these hereditary characteristics may be mentioned the occasional use of interjections;[1] the frequent use of conventional formulæ;[2] the many direct addresses of the story-teller to his company;[3] and the notice he gives of his intention to make a fresh start at some particular point in his tale.[4] Sometimes he will excuse himself to his hearers for not treating them to the long descriptions which the taste of the time leads them to expect:—

> Now wolden some men waiten, as I gesse,
> That I shuld tellen all the purveiance
> The which that th' emperour of his noblesse
> Hath shapen for his doughter Dame Custance.
> Wel may men know that so grete ordinance
> May no man tellen in a litel clause
> As was arraied for so high a cause.[5]

Or again:—

> This Theseus, this duk, this worthy knight,
> Whan he had brought hem into his citee,
> And inned hem, everich at his degree,
> He festeth hem, and doth so gret labour
> To esen hem and don hem all honour,
> That yet men wene that no mannes wit
> Of non estat ne could amenden it.
> The minstralsie, the service at the feste,
> The grete yeftes to the most and leste,
> The riche array of Theseus paleis,
> Ne who sat first ne last upon the deis,
> What ladies fayrest ben or best dancing,
> Or which of hem can carole best or sing,
> Ne who most felingly speketh of love,

---

[1] Such as *benedicite*; "so mote I the" (so may I thrive); "what!" in the sense of the Anglo-Saxon "hwæt!" *e.g.*—

> What? cherl with sory grace,
> Why art thou all forwrapped save thy face?
> "Pardoner's Tale," 12,652 (Tyrwhitt).

[2] Such as "I dare say no more" (4693), "I can say you no more" (4595), "I can no better sayn" (4462), "There n'is no more to say" (2368).

[3] Such as "Lordings, by this ensample I yow praye" (17,258).

[4] Now wol I stint of this Arviragus
And speke I wol of Dorigene his wif (11,126).

[5] "Man of Lawe's Tale" (4666).

What haukes sitten on the perche above,
What houndes liggen on the floor adoun,
Of all this now make I no mentioun,
But of the effect; that thinketh me the beste;
Now cometh the point, and herkeneth if you leste.[1]

The admirable judgment, of which Chaucer so often gives proof, alike in such criticism as the above and in his own poetical practice, gives us the measure of the loss and gain experienced by the art of minstrelsy, in its transition from the gleeman to the trouvère. Between the *Song of Beowulf* and any of the metrical romances satirised in the *Rime of Sir Thopas*, there is an interval of taste much resembling (due allowance being made for different degrees of civilisation) that which separates the oral epic of Homer from the later literary epic of Apollonius Rhodius. What has been lost in this interval is the spirit of heroic action, swift narrative, vivid presentation of character, animated rhetorical debate. All these qualities are visible in a marked degree in *Beowulf*, just as they are in the *Iliad*. On the other hand, in romances like *Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Fortenbras*, and others of their class, the characters of the heroes were transcendental or conventional; and the excessive fondness which the poets exhibit for detailed description shows how much the instinct of action has been impaired by the growth of material luxury and feudal magnificence.

At the same time something has undoubtedly been gained in the art of story-telling. The scald of the northern barbarian nourished his imagination on the mysteries of his tribal beliefs, but he could not escape from their monotony. When, however, the Teuton settled himself in the midst of the ancient civilisation he had conquered, he required his poets to provide entertainment for his rapidly expanding tastes, and the trouvère, in answer to the demand, drew fresh life and imagination from a literature hitherto entirely strange to him. The loss of his native mythology was repaired by the rich stores of ecclesiastical legend, supplied to him by the traditions of monastic Christianity. In place of the heroic

[1] "Knight's Tale," 2192.

legends of his tribe, he was introduced to the fabulous histories of the ancient world, which he recreated for himself in the image of Teutonic feudalism. The Crusades brought him into immediate communication with the East, its tales of magic, and the speculations of its dreamy philosophy. And for all this new matter, so attractive and inspiring to unsophisticated minds, an adequate literary form suggested itself in the Greek novels; from which he learned an art, unknown to the rude minstrelsy of the gleemen, the treatment of the passion of love, whereby variety, contrast, relief, suspense, in a word human interest, was given to the conduct of the fable.

Nor was it only on the chivalrous side that the art of epic poetry among the Teutonic races adapted itself to the change in the constitution of society. As the leaders and chiefs of the barbarous races gradually drew away from their subjects into the seclusion of the castle, a certain number of the gleemen followed them as retainers, but others were left outside without any settled means of livelihood. Dependent as they were on the tastes of all sorts and conditions of men, these roving minstrels were forced to look for new forms of art to gratify popular audiences. The Romance, no doubt the natural outgrowth of the Saga, was a form of poetry well adapted to beguile the *ennui* of the inmates of the castle; but there were large classes of hearers who had neither the leisure, nor perhaps the patience, to wait for the close of its prolix action. In the streets and squares of the cities especially, audiences of this kind could be easily collected to listen, while the trouvère told or chanted some short story, religious, humorous, or pathetic, but always involving a situation of human interest. For this primitive and elemental type of story there was no lack of literary models. Story-telling was always a favourite amusement in the cities of the ancient world, and the Milesian Tales had been preserved and popularised in Italy, furnishing suggestions to Apuleius and others, who had modified the type with various inventions. Another short and popular class of tale was exemplified in the different collections of

Æsop's Fables, and a third in the numerous legends of the saints authorised by the Church. When to these was added the host of unaffiliated anecdotes which are always floating on the surface of society, it will be readily seen that no great invention was required from the trouvère to develop in the art of minstrelsy the forms of the *lai* and the *fabliau*.

Taken singly the *fabliau* was too devoid of matter and substance to admit of any high degree of literary development. Here and there a tale might contain in itself enough of the ludicrous or the pathetic to be so constantly repeated as at last to seem worthy of being preserved in writing; but, as a rule, the story-tellers must have owed their success mainly to arts inseparable from their own personality. When, however, the accomplishment of reading became comparatively common, a collection of the more interesting stories was found to afford an agreeable mode of amusement; and, as may be seen from the *Lais* of Marie of France and the *Cento Novelle Antiche*, such collections were made at a very early period, both in the prose and the verse of the languages of modern Europe. Moreover it was soon recognised by the clergy that the art of story-telling was useful for the purposes of moral instruction, to which indeed, in the serious atmosphere of the East, it owed much of its popularity. The first, or nearly the first, collection of stories in Europe was made by Peter Alfonsus, a converted Jew, under the title of *Disciplina Clericalis*, or *Castoiement d'un Fils*, a work which furnished a model and a large amount of matter for the later and more celebrated *Gesta Romanorum*. This latter collection, made before the middle of the fourteenth century, carries its family history on its face; the tales it contains are numerous, and are brought together from a variety of sources, but they are all recast in one mould; each tale relates an incident which is supposed to have happened in the days of a Roman emperor, and the tale itself is followed by an interpretation, which twists the natural sense into an allegory of the scheme of Redemption.

By such means the *fabliau* established its character

as a useful instrument of amusement and edification. When that stage had been reached, the literary trouvère perceived that whatever credit he might himself obtain for invention and art must come entirely from the skill with which he arranged his collected materials. In this department, too, his Eastern predecessors had provided him with models of different degrees of ingenuity. Of these the oldest was the *Fables of Bidpai*, the composition, or rather the collection, of which is supposed to date back for more than two thousand years. A certain king of India, having shown great liberality in his treatment of the poor, has a large treasure bequeathed to him by a hermit, who has partaken of his bounty. Among the heirlooms is a piece of silk inscribed with mystic characters, which, on being interpreted, reveal to the king that another treasure of inestimable value is hidden in the mountains of Ceylon. Thither he accordingly betakes himself, and falls in with the sage Bidpai, who pours forth to him, in rapid succession, the series of tales which constitutes at once the treasure and the book.

A somewhat more complex effort of invention is found in the *Historia Septem Sapientum*, the final title given to a collection of tales, which, under the names of *Syntipas* and *Dolopathos*, were translated, at a comparatively early date, from the Persian into Greek and Latin respectively. The framework of the different stories is here furnished by an initial narrative, relating how a certain king had a son, whose life—so the wise men of the country discovered—was destined to be threatened at a certain age by imminent danger unless he were able to maintain complete silence. The prince, warned of his peril, remains speechless even in the presence of his father, till the king, who is naturally perplexed, commissions one of his wives to find out the reason of this strange behaviour. The woman endeavours to gain the affections of the prince, and he, unable to control his indignation, assails her with violent reproaches, in consequence of which, as was to be expected, a false accusation is laid against him to the king. He is on the point of

being put to death, when the seven wisest men of the kingdom entreat that an opportunity may be given them of investigating the case. The king consents, and the inquiry proceeds by the somewhat remarkable ordeal of story-telling, each of the wise men in turn relating some tale illustrative of the dangers of hasty action, which the wicked queen immediately neutralises by an anecdote leading to a contrary conclusion. This contest is prolonged until the hour of destiny is passed, when the prince's innocence is of course made plain. In this story we seem to see the embryo of the design of the *Arabian Nights*, translations of which began to circulate in Europe in the early part of the fourteenth century.

The *Arabian Nights* differs from the *Fables of Bidpai* and the *History of the Seven Wise Masters*, in so far as it is a collection made exclusively for the purposes of amusement. And in this respect it may have furnished a precedent for Boccaccio, who, when he designed the *Decameron*, was certainly not particularly solicitous about the moral improvement of his hearers. But Boccaccio far surpassed his Eastern predecessors in the artfulness of the fiction round which he grouped his materials. In every previous collection of tales there had been something improbable or extravagant in the invention of the circumstances which were supposed to give occasion to the story-telling; and this unreality was in some degree reflected in the tales themselves. Boccaccio, by connecting the time and place of his stories with an episode of real life, diffused an atmosphere of mingled beauty and truth over the whole collection. Not only did he find an opportunity for producing, in his account of the plague at Florence, an historical description which rivals the parallel passage in Thucydides, but he provided himself with a plausible apology for the effrontery of some of his tales.[1] Whether or not such a company of ladies

[1] "[illegible]

nel tempo che succedette, cagione."—Introduction to the *Decameron*

and gentlemen ever met, as he asserts, in a beautiful garden, and entertained each other, while the plague was at its height, with amusing stories and melodious songs, it must be allowed that the Florentine novelist, by giving this setting to the floating anecdotes he had collected from so many quarters and repeated with such easy grace, conciliated the prejudices of human nature with profound art.

From the foregoing sketch it will be easy to gather what were the leading rules of mediæval story-telling after it reached its literary stage. In the first place, so far from originality being required from the trouvère in the invention of his subject matter, any such attempt on his part would have been considered as a demerit, since every tale was, in the Middle Ages, regarded as a historic example of moral truth. In the second place, since the object of the trouvère was now mainly to gratify the taste of the *reader*, it was his business to provide the latter with a large collection of stories full of action and variety. In the third place, the reputation of the trouvère for poetical skill depended on the beauty and propriety of the form in which he contrived to give unity to his collection of miscellaneous materials. Looking at him in these various aspects, Chaucer's right to be esteemed the first, as he is certainly the greatest, of the English literary trouvères is, I think, incontestable. Though Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* is full of stories, that poem is composed not in the spirit of a trouvère, but of a monk, being in its design nothing but a succession of homilies to which the stories themselves are tacked by way of illustration. Whether Chaucer can be said to have been anticipated in any point of his art by Gower, is a question that I propose to consider when I come to deal with that poet. In the meantime it is certain that Chaucer was the first Englishman to *write* metrical stories for their own sake. In the Prologue to the "Man of Law's Tale" he mentions the story of Ceyx and Alcyone as the work of his youth, and in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, which was written before the appearance of the *Confessio Amantis*, he tells us that he had already composed the tale of "all the love of

Palamon and Arcite." It is not improbable that the story thus referred to—probably a rather close translation of the *Teseide*—was the original germ of the "Knight's Tale"; and when Chaucer resolved to publish a collection of stories he no doubt possessed many materials ready to his hand. The scheme of the Canterbury pilgrimage was, however, not designed till the last decade of the fourteenth century, and, contemplating as it did a hundred and sixteen tales, proved too large to be completed before the poet's death.

No one who examines this design, even in its unfinished state, can fail to observe how far the invention of Chaucer excelled that of all previous trouvères, not excepting Boccaccio himself. Nine-and-twenty persons, of whom Chaucer is one, are supposed to have met at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, on the eve of a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury. The host of the inn offers to show them the way, and proposes that, to enliven the road, each of them shall tell two tales on the journey to Canterbury, and two more on the return to London. His suggestion being approved, the company, which is made up of all ranks and orders of English society, set out on the following morning. The action of the poem consists of the incidents of the pilgrimage and of the tales related by the travellers, which are linked to each other by prefaces describing the circumstances under which each narrator performed his task.

Now, if this plan be compared with Boccaccio's, it will be seen that, while the occasion of the story-telling in the *Canterbury Tales* is not less real and lifelike than in the *Decameron*, Chaucer's scheme possesses two distinct advantages over the other, in the first place as regards the conduct of the action, in the second place as regards the arrangement of the materials. The action of the *Decameron* lacks movement and variety. When the novelist has once set his ladies and gentlemen in the midst of their garden, and has settled that ten stories shall be told on each day, and that on each day a king or queen shall be appointed to regulate the proceedings, the machinery of the action is entirely automatic. One

day resembles the next in containing the same amount of singing and story-telling: when one tale is ended another begins, with no more interval than is required to describe the laughter, the blushes, or the applause of the audience. The merit of the performance lies entirely in the manner in which the stories are told; all that relates to the story-tellers themselves is mechanical and monotonous.

In the *Canterbury Tales*, on the contrary, this picturesque symmetry is entirely wanting. The vicissitudes of the pilgrimage largely determine the character of the stories, and the action of the poem is varied by the passions of the company. Though the host is appointed to act with all the absolute powers of a master of the ceremonies, he is not always able to control the course of events. Thus, when he has settled that precedence shall be determined by lot, and when, to the great satisfaction of the cavalcade, the lot has fallen on the Knight, the latter has hardly finished his tale, when order and decency are rudely disturbed by the intervention of the drunken Miller. The character of the story itself, by the feelings it arouses, sometimes gives rise to a sequence of fresh tales, as when the Wife of Bath's views of marriage provoke a quarrel between the Frere and the Sompnoure. At other times an unexpected incident, like the arrival of the Canon's yeoman, furnishes a motive for the story; moreover, the audience themselves are not slow to interrupt a story-teller who becomes tedious or offensive. Thus the interest of the poem lies not so much in the tales told, as in the life, humour, and vivacity of the pilgrims who tell them.

Again, with regard to the distribution of the materials. The main object of the literary trouvère was to collect appropriate subjects, and Chaucer, with his habits of encyclopaedic study and omnivorous reading, had amassed a supply of stories, not indeed so numerous as those collected by Boccaccio, but covering a wider range of tastes and interests. The following scheme shows the various subjects of the *Canterbury Tales* and the sources from which the poet derived them:—

Narrator.	Subject.	Source.
Monk	Tragedies { sacred / secular	Boccaccio, *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium.* Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica.*
Parson	Sermon on Seven Deadly Sins	Homilies. *La Somme des Vices et des Vertus.*
Nun's Priest	Cock and Fox	Le Roman de Renart, "Si comme Renart prist Chanticler le coc."
Prioress	Boy killed by Jews	"Miracles of our Lady," Vernon MS.
Second Nun	Legend of St. Cecilia	*Legenda Aurea* of Jacopo da Voragine, or a Latin Life of St. Cecilia.
Pardoner	Death and the Robbers	*Cento Novelle Antiche.* Oriental origin, *Vedabbha Jâtaka.*
Sompnoure	The Friar's Legacy	Fabliau, *Le dit de la Vescie a Prestre.*
Frere	The Sompnoure and the Devil	Latin story, *Promptuarium Exemplorum.* *Narratio de quodam Senescallo Sceleroso,* and *De Advocato et Diabolo.*
Clerk	Story of *Griselda*	Boccaccio, who took it from an old French story, *Parement des Femmes.*
Knight	Palamon and Arcite	Boccaccio, *Teseide,* and Statius, *Thebais.*
Squire	Magic Horse, Ring, Mirror	*Thousand and One Nights.* Marco Polo.
Franklin	Dorigene and Arviragus	Boccaccio, *Decameron,* x. 5. Original in *Vetâla Panchavinsati.*
Man of Law	Story of Custance	Fabulous Chronicle of Nicholas Trivet.
Doctor	Story of Appius and Virginia	*Roman de la Rose.*
Merchant	January and May	Fables of Adolphus. Tale of Eastern origin, *Bahâr i Dânush.*
Shipman	The Monk, the Merchant, and his Wife	Boccaccio, viii. 1. *Evidently founded on fabliau.*
Manciple	The Talking Bird	Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* ii. 9, *Romans des Sept Sages,* English version, fourteenth century, "Proces of the Sevyn Sages."
Reve	*Miller of Trompington*	*Gombert et les deux Clercs (fabliau).*
Canon's Yeoman	The Canon's Alchemy	Original.
Miller	The Carpenter and the Clerk	Some *fabliau.*
Cook	The Prentice (unfinished)	Some *fabliau.*
Wife of Bath	(1) Story of her Married Life	(1) *Roman de la Rose.* *Valerius ad Rufinum.* St. Jerome, *Contra Jovinianum.*
	(2) The Loathly Lady	(2) Same source as Gower's *Story of Florent.*
Chaucer	(1) Sir Thopas	(1) Parody of Romances.
	(2) Melibeus	(2) Translation of *Le Livre de Melibee et de dame Prudence.*

It will thus be seen that Chaucer levied contributions for his story-telling on the Fathers of the Church, on Homilies, on Legends of the Saints, on Scholastic History, Secular History, and Fabulous Chronicles, on Fables and Animal-tales, on Romances and Lays, on Latin poetry, and on French *fabliaux*, and on the tricks and frauds of the scientific charlatans of his times. Few poets would have had invention enough to dispose artistically of all these miscellaneous materials: an audience like Boccaccio's would have refused to listen to the Monk's Tale, and would have scattered in dismay at the Parson's Sermon; but in the large and diversified company to which Chaucer introduces us there is a representative of every kind of human interest, who, when his turn comes, is allowed to indulge his own taste in stories, at least up to a certain point. When this point of tolerance is passed, the audience begins to criticise, so that even the most dismal 'tragedy" and the most long-winded romance acquire in their context a certain interest, partly because they are told in character, and partly because the judgments passed on them by the pilgrims reflect the temper of society at large. Again, the dramatic character of the design furnishes an apology for the tone of some of the tales. Chaucer is very emphatic in reiterating the argument of "authority" which he had previously advanced in *Troilus and Criseyde* and in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*.

What shuld I more say but this Millere
He nolde his wordes for no man forbere,
But tolde his cherles tale in his manere:
Methinketh that I shall rehearse it here:
And therfore every gentle wight I pray,
For Goddes love, as deme not that I say
Of evil intent, but that I mote reherse
Hir tales alle, al be they better or worse,
Or elles falsen some of my matere;
And therefore who so list it not to here
Turne over the leaf, and chuse another tale,
For he shal find ynowe both grete and smale,
Of storial thing that toucheth gentilesse,
And eke moralite, and holinesse.
Blameth not me, if that ye chese amiss.[1]

[1] Miller's Prologue (Skeat, iv. p. 91).

The remarkable judgment and invention, shown by Chaucer in the handling of his dramatic machinery, is nowhere seen to greater advantage than in the use which he makes of two characters, the Host and himself. Harry Bailly is precisely the person required to preserve order and unity among the story-tellers. As the keeper of an inn, he is acquainted with all sorts and conditions of men. He is neither above nor below the morals of his company; not exempt himself from the vice of swearing, which brings upon him the reproof of the Parson, but with sufficient justness of feeling to allow him to distinguish the inconsistency between the religious professions and the practice of the Monk. A quick wit and tolerably wide sympathies make him an appreciative listener to stories of every kind. At the same time he is something of a critic, whose principle is always *ne quid nimis*. Like the Greek chorus, he is ready to pronounce judgment on every situation; hence his character appears in a variety of lights, according as he feels called upon to reprove the drunken Miller, to keep the peace between the Frere and the Sompnoure, or to address the other members of the pilgrimage in appropriate tones of politeness or irony. He is respectful to the Knight, courteous to the ladies, sarcastic to the clergy, authoritative with the "churls." As to Chaucer's own part, besides the duty which naturally falls to him of giving a minute description of all the persons and incidents of the pilgrimage, he introduces himself with much pleasantry as the reciter of a tale which he means to be ridiculous; when this is cut short in the middle, he makes his failure an excuse for resorting to prose, whereby he is able to economise for the occasion one of his unpublished compositions.

Viewed as a whole, the *Canterbury Tales* reflect every aspect of the trouvère's art, and show how it adapted itself to the changes in the constitution of society. The tale, in its original form the most elementary kind of imitation, became, when employed by the Church for the purposes of moral instruction, an "ensample" appended to a homily; afterwards, as the idea of amusement

gradually prevailed over that of instruction, the tale itself assumed the place of importance, and the moral was only tacitly inferred from it. Hence sprang the revived principle of the direct imitation of nature,—so long buried under the allegorical modes of interpretation encouraged in the Church schools,—and acquired a constant growth of life and strength from the study of classical literature. In the "Parson's Tale" (which is no tale) we find an example of the unadorned style of teaching through the homily; there are one or two specimens of stories told in immediate illustration of some religious or philosophical doctrine, notably the "Monk's Tale," the "Pardoner's Tale," and the "Tale of Melibœus"; while a few others, such as the "Wife of Bath's Tale," the "Manciple's Tale," and the "Nonnes Priest's Tale," contain "ensamples" of more secular truths. But in the more elaborate stories, such as "Griselda," "Custance," "Dorigene and Arviragus," "January and May," "Palamon and Arcite," "The Magic Horse, Ring, and Mirror," the interest is concentrated almost exclusively in the various situations and incidents. This class displays the literary art of the trouvère in its full development. On the other hand, the short and farcical stories of common life, founded almost invariably on *fabliaux*, like the tales of the Reve, the Miller, the Sompnoure and the Frere, are little more than revivals of the oral method of the story-teller in its rudimentary stages, and borrow either the traditions of folk lore or anecdotes of the old Milesian order.

In no epic poet has the direct imitation of nature ever been carried so far as in Chaucer. It is the very essence of his style. I have already cited the lines in which he excuses himself for the matter of the "Miller's Tale" by the character of the narrator. In the following passage in the Prologue he lays down the same principle as broadly and with even greater plainness:—

Who so shal telle a tale after a man,
He moste reherse, as neighe as ever he can,

Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
Al speke he never so rudely and so large;
Or elles he moste tellen his tale untrewe,
Or feinen thinges, or finden wordes newe.
He may not spare, although he were his brother,
He moste as wel sayn o word as another.
Crist spake himself ful brode in holy writ,
And wel ye wote no vilanie is it.
Eke Plato sayeth, who so can him rede,
The wordes moste ben cosin to the dede.

To the same principle we owe his minute and delicate record of details in dress, person, and behaviour. It is needless to say that the Prologue to the *Tales* is a mine of observation, but two passages may be cited from it in illustration of the fine contrasts of Chaucer's style. The first is from the portrait of the Prioress :—

At mete was she wel ytaught withalle;
She lette no morsel from hire lippes falle,
Ne wette hire fingres in hire sauce depe.
Wel coude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe,
That no drope ne fell upon hire brest.
In curtesie was sette ful moche hire lest.[1]
Hire over-lippe wiped she so clene,
That in hire cuppe was no ferthing[2] sene
Of grese, whan she drunken hadde hire draught.

With this dainty lady compare the following details from the description of the Miller:—

His berd as any sowe or fox was rede,
And thereto brode as though it were a spade.
Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
A wert, and thereon stode a tufte of heres,
Red as the bristles of a sowes eres.
His nose-thirles[3] blacke were and wide.

This management of poetical *chiaroscuro* is contrived without any violation of probability, because, on a pilgrimage, differences of rank for the moment naturally disappeared. Aware, however, of the prejudices of his readers, Chaucer thinks it advisable to apologise for not presenting

[1] Pleasure. [2] Spot. [3] Nostrils.

the companions of his journey according to their degrees in society,[1] and throughout the narrative he is most careful to give a just representation of external forms and behaviour. His "Knight's Tale" is a faithful mirror of feudal usages: in the "Man of Law's Tale" he censures some of his predecessors for imputing to one of the persons in the story an action which would have involved a breach of etiquette.[2] So strict, indeed, is his adherence to truth and nature, that, though he died before the completion of his design, it is easy to follow the operations of his mind in the arrangement of his various materials. We can see that he found it impossible to carry out the plan proposed by the Host, that each of the company should tell *two* tales on the road to Canterbury, and that he changed his mind more than once with regard to what may be called the *articulation* of the narrative of the pilgrimage.[3] On the other hand it is plain that he meant the stages of his poetical pilgrimage to conform minutely with what would have been the course of real life. In the journey from London to Canterbury four days were generally consumed, and the recognised halting-places on the road were Dartford, Rochester, Ospring. Now from the incidental mention of times and places in the *Canterbury Tales* we are able to infer that Chaucer intended to make this distribution of the journey the framework of his narrative, so that the various tales, even in the incomplete state of the main narrative, can be assigned with much probability to the day on which they were actually told.

The travellers set out from the Tabard at daybreak escorted by the Miller and his bagpipes, and the first

[1] Also I pray yow to foryeve it me
Al have I nat set folk in hir degre
Here in this tale as that they sholde stonde.

[2] "Man of Law's Tale," Skeat's *Chaucer*, iv. p. 162, v. 988.

[3] Thus we have the beginning of a tale told by the Cook, although we find in the main narrative that the Cook, when called upon by the Host to tell a story, was by no means in a fit state to fulfil his undertaking. Again we are told that when the Monk began his story the pilgrims were in sight of Rochester. The Monk is exceedingly prolix, yet though it is certain that the company must have slept at Rochester, the Host, after he has stopped him in the midst of his tragedies, proceeds to requisition the Nun's Priest for a tale.

mention of time occurs after the latter has told his tale, when the Host observes:—

> Lo Depeford, and it is half-way pryme,

i.e. 7.30 A.M. It may be supposed that the roads in the neighbourhood of London were more carefully mended than in the remoter districts where we know, alike from the *Canterbury Tales* and from external evidence, that they were little better than quagmires.[1] The pilgrims, at any rate, though they were so well advanced on their journey at this early hour, do not seem to have gone farther than Dartford, the usual halting-place on the first day; for in the Prologue to the "Man of Law's Tale," the poet makes the Host take an astronomical observation in order to ascertain the day and the hour:—

> He wist it was the eighteteethe day
> Of April;

and

> It was ten of the clokke he gan conclude;

and it is plain enough that this determination of the date would not have occurred on the same day as the mention of the time of arrival at Deptford and Greenwich. A fairly well-connected series of tales brings the travellers, on the second day, to Rochester, where they would have slept. The Squire must have told his story on the third day, for he makes a fresh reference to the time of day:—

> I wol not taryen now for it is pryme,

i.e. 9 o'clock. He must have been followed later in the day by the Wife of Bath, whose strongly-pronounced views on marriage give rise to the quarrel between the Frere and the Sompnoure, which, it appears, took place when they were in the neighbourhood of Sittingbourne. Here the party no doubt dined, resting for the night at a place which is not named, but which external evidence determines beyond doubt to have been Ospring. Early on the

[1] See Prologue to the Nonnes Prieste's Tale (Skeat, vol iv p. 270):—

> I sholde er this have fallen doun for slepe
> Although the slough had never been so depe

morning of the fourth day a laughable incident occurs. The Cook, who has been at an early hour drinking freely of bad ale, falls off his horse at a place which it is now difficult to identify:—

> Wite ye not wel wher stant a litel town
> Which that y-cleped is Bob-up-and-down,
> Under the Blee in Canterbury weye?

and afterwards, near Boughton under Blee, the pilgrims are overtaken by the Canon and his Yeoman, who must also have been sleeping at Ospring. This was probably in the afternoon, for the Yeoman observes:—

> Sirs, now in *the morwe tyde* [*i.e.* the morning]
> Out of the hostelrye I sey yow ryde.

The last stage on the road is appropriately occupied with the sermon of the Poor Parson.[1]

Looking back over this survey of Chaucer's poetical progress, we find scarcely one of his works in which we are not called upon to admire the presence of a powerful and penetrating genius. When the language came into his hands it was rude and inharmonious, inadequate to express either the complex ideas of philosophy or the finer shades of character; when he left it it had been endowed with a copious vocabulary, refined syntax, musical numbers; it was fitted to become the vehicle of a noble literature. In one sense Chaucer is the poet of the Schools. Brought up in the nurture of encyclopædic learning, an intense intellectual curiosity carried him into studies which must have crushed a feebler mind, equipped with a necessarily imperfect instrument of expression. But the treasures that he drew from theology, astronomy, and alchemy were seldom used, as is so often the case in the *Romance of the Rose* and other poems of the mediæval period, for the mere purpose of display, but were devoted to the enrichment and illustration of his art. Again, there is a sense in which Chaucer is an imitative poet. He admired with all the enthusiasm of fine taste the more finished art

[1] See as to the order of the Tales Skeat's *Chaucer*, vol. iii. 374-80.

of the poets of France and Italy, and felt no scruple in transferring bodily many of their thoughts and sentiments into the English tongue; he borrowed, however, not from poverty but from enterprise, and used the poems of his contemporaries or predecessors, as a banker uses the deposits of his customers, for the enlargement of his own fortunes.

As a court poet, employing the allegorical methods of the successors of the troubadours, Chaucer was no doubt trammelled by the use of an art with which his genius was only half in sympathy; yet within these conventional limits his work always shows judgment and invention. As the lineal descendant of the trouvères his success was far greater. In him the epic genius of national romance reached its culminating point: he was the last and the greatest representative in English of the mediæval art of story-telling. Half-conceptions were formed in later days of possible epics founded on legendary English themes. Milton meditated a poem on "King Arthur," and Pope a poem on "Brutus"; but it is plain that any attempt to execute such designs must have ended in failure · the subjects were not suited for the purpose. Chaucer, the literary representative of the almost obsolete minstrel, gave to the *roman*, the *lai*, the *fabliau*, the proper and only form which epical romance could assume in our language. Two centuries after him Spenser sought to complete what had been

> Left half told,
> The story of Cambuscan bold;

but his tale lacks human interest. The same poet in *Mother Hubberd's Tale* carried on the tradition of his predecessor from the *Tale of the Cock and the Fox*, only to show, however, how far the old mediæval Æsopic humour had fallen into decay; while Dryden, in spite of the splendour and harmony of his verse, invested the beast fable in his *Hind and Panther* with an atmosphere of absurdity. The author of the "Squire's Tale" and the "Nun's Priest's Tale" has neither second nor third in his art.

By his treatment of the story Chaucer immediately prepared the way for still nobler poetry of a different class. The development of the art of the trouvère furnishes a notable example of that natural evolution of the drama from the epic which Plato and Aristotle notice in Greek literature. From the earliest times the chant or recitation of the minstrel, containing as it did dialogue as well as action, involved a certain amount of dramatic imitation, and to this was added, when the story began to assume a literary form, the more intricate development of plot and character. When he had introduced a variety of highly-finished characters into a single action, and had engaged them in animated dialogue, Chaucer had fulfilled every requirement of a dramatist, short of bringing his play upon the stage. It is true that his conception of the drama was in itself rudimentary, and was formed, like Langland's, upon the Miracle Plays, in which the *dramatis personae* were made to speak primarily for the purpose of instruction; so that he sees no impropriety in putting such a speech as this into the mouth of the Pardoner:—

By this gaude[1] have I wonnen yere by yere
An hondred mark sin I was Pardonere.
I stonde like a clerk in my pulpet,
And whan the lewede peple is doun yset,
I preche so as ye han herd before,
And telle an hundred false japes more.
Than peine I me to stretchen forth my necke
And est and weste upon the peple I becke,
As doth a dove, sitting upon a berne:
Myn hondes and my tonge gon so yerne,[2]
That it is joye to see my besinesse.
Of avarice and of swiche cursednesse
Is all my preching, for to make hem fre
To yeve hir pens, and namely[3] unto me.
For min entente is not but for to winne,[4]
And nothing for correction of sinne.
I recke never whan that they be beried,
Though that hir soules gon a blake beried.

Nor has he any idea of tragedy in the Shakespearian sense of the word. The progress of the trouvère's art

[1] Jest. [2] Briskly. [3] Especially. [4] Only to get money.

was not favourable to the treatment of the sublime or the pathetic: Chaucer rarely attempts either, and when he does, usually has recourse to the machinery of interjections and apostrophes, by way of hinting to his audience that it is time to display a little emotion.[1] On the other hand we find in the *Canterbury Tales* all the elements of the Elizabethan comedy. The Host, the Miller, the Reve, the Wife of Bath, and the like, were the thoroughly English models for Falstaff, Bottom, Dogberry, and all that large army of nameless representatives of the working world, with which Shakespeare enlivened the action of his more serious plays.

Again, in his capacity of trouvère, Chaucer shows himself to be the father of English satire. As far indeed as the more directly moral side of satire was concerned, the art of story-telling did not lend itself readily to the use of ridicule for purely didactic purposes, and the situations in most of the tales in which the narrators lampoon each other's characters are mainly farcical. Nevertheless, moral and literary judgments are very skilfully, though indirectly, conveyed; sometimes by means of contrast, as where the virtues of the Poor Parson are made to reflect on the defects of his order; more commonly through irony, as in the portrait of the Monk[2]:—

> He gave not of the text a pulled hen
> That saith that hunters ben not holy men
> Ne that a monk, whan he is rekkeles,
> Is like to a fish that is waterles;
> That is to say, a monk out of his cloistre
> This ilke text held he not worth an oistre,

[1] When the "Soudannesse" in the "Man of Law's Tale" meditates a massacre, Chaucer apostrophises her thus

> O Soudannesse, rote of iniquitee,
> Virago, thou Semyramee the secound,
> O serpent under femininitee,
> Like to the serpent depe in helle y bound,
> O feined woman, all that may confound
> Vertue and innocence thurgh thy malice
> Is bred in thee, as nest of every vice.

[2] Compare also Prologue, vv. 227-232, 251-257. "Sompnoure's Tale," 7370. (Tyrwh[illegible]) [illegible] "Sir T[illegible] author [illegible] and see [illegible] note on this line.

And I say his opinion was good;
What shulde he studie, and maken himselven wood,
Upon a boke in cloistre alway to pore,
Or swinken with his hondes, and laboure,
As Austin bit? how shal the world be served?
Let Austin have his swink to him reserved.

But it was above all in the nice observation of inconsistencies in conduct, the power of selecting what is typical in manners and character, the art of drawing finished and various portraits in verse, that Chaucer showed the way to the poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His descriptions of men are as comprehensive as Dryden's, his pictures of women as minute as those of Pope; but he is a more genial painter than either, and his satire leads us to survey mankind with toleration rather than contempt.

To sum up all these excellences of Chaucer in a single phrase, he is the first *national* poet of England. Not indeed that the feeling of nationality is anywhere prominent in his poetry, as it is in that of Shakespeare, or that he has consciously emerged from the envelope of Feudalism and Scholasticism, in which the thought of Europe was still swathed. There is no mention of Crecy or Poitiers in the praises of his Knight, whose great reputation has been acquired solely in warfare with the infidel. There is none of the anti-papal feeling, so conspicuous in Langland, among the Canterbury pilgrims, faithful children of a Church whose education has done much to form and direct the thought of all of them, even of the poet himself. Yet the foundations of Chaucer's art are not laid exclusively either in the encyclopædic education or in chivalry. In his picture of the Canterbury pilgrimage, with the frankness of criticism prevailing among all its members, with the strength of its public opinion, with its power of regulating its own affairs, we find, what as yet had nowhere else appeared in modern European literature, the image of an organised *nation*. This revived idea of civil society, overlaid since the fall of the Roman Empire by the great educational structure of the Church, furnishes the groundwork of the political Renaissance.

Concurrently with the conscious growth of civil liberty, there came almost inevitably a change in the fundamental conceptions of art. Poetry was removed from the regions of Metaphysics, Allegory, and Theology, and from the deductive methods of thought encouraged by encyclopædic science, and began to be reanimated by the old classical principle of the direct imitation of nature. Once more it was perceived, however dimly, that "the purpose of playing, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature"; once more it was felt that "the proper study of mankind is man." When the truth of this principle in art was realised, it was rapidly developed in other European countries, by *Ariosto, by Cervantes, by Molière, but to Chaucer must* be assigned the honour of having led the way. The principle has often been carried in practice, and not seldom by Chaucer himself, into illegitimate coarseness and materialism. From the mild irony of his remarks on the sporting inclinations of the Monk, and from the tolerant amusement with which he describes the quarrel between the Frere and the Sompnoure, we might infer that he was indifferent in his moral judgments. Born dramatist as he was, he may sometimes have felt with Shakespeare that

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players

But, on the other hand, the imperishable portrait of the Poor Parson, in its true and simple beauty, shows us that his genial humour was only one aspect of his imaginative view of life, and that with him, as is the case with all the greatest poets, the moral is to be looked for not in the artist's motive, but in his art.

CHAPTER VIII

THE EPICAL SCHOOL OF CHAUCER—GOWER, LYDGATE. OCCLEVE

In one respect the course of English poetry presents a singular contrast to the parallel development of the art in Greece and Rome. It may seem strange that when poetry in England had made with Chaucer such characteristic beginnings in so many different directions, nearly two centuries should have passed before his work was in any way advanced. When Æschylus began his improvements, Attic tragedy was rapidly carried by his successors through all the further stages of which it was capable. When Ennius had given the first indications of the harmonies inherent in Latin, one poet after another followed in his steps, until the versification of the language was perfected by the skill of Virgil and Horace. But in England, between Chaucer and Surrey, scarcely a writer appeared who can by a stretch of indulgence be regarded as a poet of the first or even of the second class. After the death of the former those peculiarly modern notes which his muse had sounded died away, and were not heard again until Shakespeare and his contemporaries revived them on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage.

Nevertheless English poetry, though a tree of slow growth, furnishes in its history groups of well-marked phenomena which illustrate the law of its progress. At long intervals we may observe a remarkable efflorescence of genius among poets and novelists resembling each other in their aims and endowments; and these periods

of inspiration are invariably followed by times of comparative torpor in which the power of imaginative production seems almost to have ceased. Such epochs of action and subsequent reaction are found at the close of the reign of Edward III., and through the reign of Richard II., when the chief representatives of English poetry were Langland and Chaucer; at the end of the reign of Elizabeth, and through the reign of James I., when the drama reached the zenith of its glory; in the reigns of Anne and George I., the "Augustan" period of wit and correctness; and in the last years of the reign of George III., and in the reign of George IV., which witnessed the revival of the Romantic school. There is too much regularity in these appearances to allow us to ascribe them simply to the fortuitous influence of individual genius; and indeed, when they are examined, it is seen that they correspond closely with the ebb and flow of moral and intellectual movements in the life of the nation at large.

For it will be observed that, in English history, the periods of greatest activity in literature do not coincide precisely with the most glorious periods of political action; the harvest of thought and expression follows the mental exaltation arising from great deeds, and comes to a close as the energy and enthusiasm of the national movement exhaust themselves, or are counteracted by the tide of opposing forces. Thus, to take the examples with which we have become familiar in the course of this history, the poetry of Langland represents the sum of all those feelings which had been working in the mind of the more reflective part of English society, and particularly in its Anglo-Saxon element, since the times of John and Henry III.; the national dislike of the interference of a foreign ecclesiastical power with domestic affairs; the shock given to the general conscience by the violent contrasts between religious profession and religious practice, especially in the monastic orders; the attempt to constitute an ideal of life for all orders of the community founded on practical principles

of piety and justice. These sentiments, thrown into dogmatic shape by Wycliffe and his followers, translated into exaggerated action by John Ball, Jack Straw, and the revolting villeins, find their highest form of poetical expression in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman;* the ebb of the movement is marked partly by the reaction against the Lollards under Henry IV. and Henry V., reflected in a literary form in the poetry of Occleve; and partly by the revival of strict orthodoxy among the ruling classes, which derived poetical nourishment from the numerous devotional treatises in metre produced by John Lydgate, the monk of Bury St. Edmunds.

Again, the poetry of Chaucer represents the high-water mark of the movement in the direction of municipal self-government among the middle classes, which is so plainly visible in France, Flanders, and England during the fourteenth century, embodying itself in such characters as the Van Arteveldts or Etienne Marcel, and in such political organisms as the parliaments of Richard II. The Canterbury pilgrimage, as has been already said, is a kind of poetical microcosm, in which all the orders of English society are seen mixing in the freedom of daily intercourse, criticising each other's conduct, and delivering their own opinions on religion, morals, and taste. Then comes the reaction in poetry as well as in politics. As the growth of the power of Parliament, prematurely rapid during the reign of Richard II., was checked first by the strong character of his immediate successors, and afterwards by the agony of dynastic feudalism in the Wars of the Roses; so, when the social springs of inspiration failed, did the dramatic spirit and artistic judgment of Chaucer disappear from the work of those who called themselves his disciples. The forces of feudalism are seen to resume their sway. Instead of the stories of common life developed from the *fabliau;* instead of the moving adventures of Griselda and Constance anticipating the pathetic action of the later drama; the reader finds himself again in the exhausted regions of romance, travelling under the direction of Lydgate through the thrice-

told tales of Thebes and Troy, in the midst of narratives of Paladins of the class of Sir Thopas; or wandering, in later times, with Stephen Hawes through labyrinths of courtly allegory, constructed after the models of Guillaume de Lorris. The appearance above the horizon of the sun of the Renaissance with all its light, freshness, and human interest, has been no longer than a February day in the Polar regions.

It is a significant fact that, until the appearance of Dryden's famous criticism, the causes of Chaucer's superiority to all the poets of his time seem never to have been rightly understood. He was regarded either as one of the early improvers of our language, as a successful story-teller, or as an allegorical poet of the Court of Love; and in these various capacities we find him generally ranked by his contemporaries, as well as by his successors up to the middle of the seventeenth century, with Gower. There is good reason for believing that Chaucer himself felt strongly the injustice of this verdict; but he would not have demurred to the general grounds on which it was based; and as the question is one which throws considerable light on the progress of our poetry, I propose to examine in some detail the relations existing between these two poets.

Chaucer and Gower were originally friends. When the former had completed his *Troilus and Criseyde* he dedicated it to the "philosophical Strode and moral Gower"; and Gower paid a compliment to Chaucer through the mouth of Venus towards the close of the first version of his *Confessio Amantis*.—

> And grete wel Chaucer whan ye mete,
> As my disciple and my poete.
> For in the floure of his youth,
> In sundry wise, as he wel couth,
> Of ditties and of songes glade,
> The which he for my sake made,
> The lond fulfilled is over all;
> Whereof to him in speciall
> Above all other I am most holde.
> Forthy now in his daies olde
> Thou shalt him telle this message,
> That he upon his later age,

To sette an end of all his werke,
As he which is min owne clerke,
Do make his testament of love,
As thou hast do thy shrifte above,
So that my court it may recorde.[1]

There is nothing to show when these lines were composed, but in 1393 ("the sixteethe yere of King Richard") Gower produced a new edition of the *Confessio Amantis* from which the compliment to Chaucer was removed. Chaucer, on his side, inserted before the "Man of Law's Tale" in the Canterbury pilgrimage, which must have been published shortly before or after the date just mentioned, a Prologue containing a severe reflection on the morality of two of the tales in the *Confessio Amantis;* and not content with this criticism, he returned to the attack in the tale itself, and blamed Gower, though without mentioning him by name, for misrepresenting a particular incident recorded in it.

The only plausible suggestion that has been offered for the suppression of the lines in the *Confessio Amantis*—namely, that Chaucer was at the time in political disgrace[2]—besides being discreditable to Gower, is inconsistent with the fact that his poem is dedicated to Henry of Lancaster, the son of John of Gaunt, Chaucer's old friend and patron. Nor is it easy to see why Chaucer should have gone out of his way to find an opportunity for censuring Gower, unless he were under the influence of some strong personal feeling. For not merely does his Prologue insist on the impropriety of telling stories like those of Canace and Apollonius of Tyre, but it asserts, without any manifest necessity for such a digression, the transcendent merits of Chaucer as a voluminous story-teller. The whole combination of circumstances, in fact, can only be explained by assuming the existence of professional jealousy between the two poets. On this hypothesis the facts of the case are easily intelligible. Chaucer had been the first to show how the English language

[1] *Confessio Amantis* (Carisbrooke Library), p. 442.
[2] *Confessio Amantis of John Gower.* By Dr. Reinhold Pauli. Introductory Essay, p. xv.

might be harmoniously adapted to French models, in the octosyllabic metre and the seven-line stanza of five accents. He had been the first to tell, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, an extended story on a dramatic plan. He had also written one or two shorter tales or gestes after the manner of Boccaccio, a thing which had not before been attempted in English verse. But he had as yet formed no collection of stories linked together by a central design, and Gower, by accomplishing this feat in his *Confessio Amantis*, had, to that slight extent, entitled himself to the credit of priority of invention. Gower's work had doubtless many admirers, some of whom may have exalted his genius as superior to that of Chaucer. The latter would certainly have been piqued, even while his invention was stimulated, by a preference which he knew to be unjust; and when he formed the design of the Canterbury pilgrimage, it would have been natural for him to reflect on his rival in the Prologue to the "Man of Law's Tale." Resentment at this attack, or—if the second edition of the *Confessio Amantis* preceded the publication of the *Canterbury Tales*—the friction rising out of constant and odious comparisons, would have led Gower on his side to suppress the early compliment to a friend from whom he was now estranged.

Of the life of John Gower few memorials remain. The date of his birth is uncertain, but it is probable that he was somewhat older than Chaucer, and he outlived him by eight years, dying in 1408. Connected with a knightly family, the Gowers of Suffolk and Kent, his birth and position account for the strong vein of feudal and ecclesiastical feeling which prevails in his works, and for the absence of that sympathy with the humours of bourgeois life which marks the poetry of Chaucer. He had lands at Otford on the Darent, and acquired the manors of Kentwell Hall in Suffolk and Feltwell and Moulton in Norfolk. Late in life he appears to have taken orders,[1] and to have married quite in old age (1397)

[1] He held the living of Braxted Magna in Essex. H. Morley, *English Writers*, iv. 156.

one Agnes Groundolf. Three years after his marriage he became blind, and the eight years before his death were spent in the Priory of St. Mary Overies, now St. Saviour's, Southwark, which he had repaired at his own expense. The church of the Priory contains his monument, where he is represented with his head resting on his three chief works, written in French, Latin, and English; namely *Speculum Meditantis*, *Vox Clamantis*, and *Confessio Amantis*.

Besides the works just mentioned, Gower, probably while young, composed in French fifty ballads, which show him to have been a complete master of that language, and thoroughly versed in all the conventional rules required of poets who treated the subject of love according to the traditions of the Provençal school. The ballads are written sometimes in seven, sometimes in eight-lined stanzas of octosyllabic verse, with the usual burden, and with combinations of recurrent rhymes. They show a careful attention to the laws of metrical harmony, but have no individual character.

Of the *Speculum Meditantis*, in spite of the assertions of Warton and others,[1] no trace remains under that name. From its title we may reasonably infer it to have been of a religious character. The *Vox Clamantis*, on the other hand, is a didactic poem, and though composed with a fine contempt for the rules of Latin prosody, and with no very high respect for those of Latin syntax, possesses considerable interest, as illustrating the history of the time and Gower's own character. It was inspired by the rising of the commons under Wat Tyler, of which, as a landholder of Kent, the poet had had personal experience, and which, after describing it with deep abhorrence and a certain amount of humour, he makes the text for an inquiry into the state of the various orders of English society. The first and much the longest book is occupied with the description of a dream, in which the poet sees all the domestic animals go mad. Asses refuse to bear burdens, oxen to plough; dogs become beasts of prey; birds and insects combine for the destruction of the land. The assembled animals are addressed by Watte the jay, who advises

[1] *History of English Poetry* (1840), vol. ii. p. 226. But see Note at the end of this Chapter.

them to rise and destroy the law. From this picture of anarchy Gower turns, in the second book, to prove that the world is governed by God, not by Fortune; the third book describes the disorders of the different elements of society, according to the division recognised by Wycliffe and Langland—clergy (*oratores*), knights (*bellatores*), labourers (*laboratores*)—and dwells especially on the vices of the secular clergy; the fourth exposes the faults of the monastic orders; the fifth of the knights and the villeins; while the sixth inveighs against the lawyers. The seventh and last book deals with the prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

The *Vox Clamantis*, viewed historically, is worthy of detailed study, but I confine myself to selecting from it two passages, the former of which illustrates the character of the poet, while the latter may be read in connection with the parallel passage in *Piers Plowman's Vision* respecting the food of the working classes in the reign of Richard II. In the following lines Gower recites the words of the celestial voice which he heard in his dream:—

> Immo tibi potius modo provideas, quia discors
> Insula te cepit, pax ubi raro manet.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Semper agas timidus, et quæ tibi læta videntur,
> Dum loqueris fieri tristia posse putes.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Otia corpus alunt, corpus quoque pascitur illis,
> Excessusque tui damna laboris habent.
> Gaudet de modico natura, sed illud abundans,
> Quod nimis est, hominem semper egere facit.
> Te tamen admoneo, tibi cum dent otia tempus,
> Quidquid in hoc somno visus et auris habent
> Scribere festines, nam somnia sæpe futurum
> Judicium reddunt.
>
> *Vox Clamantis*, i 2022.[1]

[1] Nay rather make provision for thyself, since thy lot has fallen in an island full of civil discord, where peace rarely abides . . . Always act with timid caution; and deem that what seem to thee to be joys may even while thou speakest turn to sorrows. . . . Leisure nourishes the body the body too thrives upon it; and thy excesses have all the ills of labour Nature rejoices in moderation, but superfluity ever makes men to want. I advise thee, however, when leisure gives thee the opportunity, make haste to write whatever has filled eye and ear during this sleep, for dreams often afford a true revelation of the future.

In these lines we seem to see a reflection of the natural timidity which, after the rising of the commons, prompted the poet to look for a peaceful asylum in the Priory of St. Mary Overies. The following passage, describing the daintiness of the labouring classes after the Black Death, shows, when compared with the sentiments of Langland, how wide-spread were the apprehensions in society caused by the villeins' revolt:—

Omnia salsa nocent tantum, neque cocta placebunt,
  Ni sibi des assum murmurat ipse statim.
Nil sibi cervisia tenuis neque cisera confert;
  Nec rediet tibi cras ni meliora paras.

. . . . . .

His nisi justitia fuerit terrore parata,
  Succumbent domini tempore, credo, brevi.[1]

The character of the *Vox Clamantis* no doubt procured for Gower the "moral" reputation which Chaucer recognises in his *Troilus and Criseyde*, and prepared the way for the composition of the *Confessio Amantis*. This work was undertaken at the command of the king, who met the poet, as the latter tells us in his first edition, coming to London by water, and requested that he would write something in English. Gower, being at the time in poor health, seems to have embarked on his enterprise without much enthusiasm. A certain poverty of invention is visible in the "moral" design of the *Confessio*, the Prologue of which is nothing but an abstract of the line of thought pursued in the *Vox Clamantis*. It mainly consists of a survey of the history of the world, regarded as an illustration of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. "But man himself," says Gower, "must also be regarded as a microcosm, and the conflict and disorder, rising out of the mixed elements that compose his nature, are the

[1] All salt foods are merely hurtful; nor will baked meats satisfy him; if you don't give him roast he forthwith grumbles. He thinks nothing of small beer and cider; nor will he come back to work on the morrow unless you find him something better. . . . If exemplary justice be not executed on these men, my belief is that the lords will be shortly ruined.—*Vox Clamantis*, v. 641. Compare the passage from the *Vision of Piers the Plowman* on p. 222.

causes of the anarchy of the world at large." He will write, he says, partly of the old world, partly of the new. In the old world Love bore rule, and then were the days of Peace, Health, Righteousness, and Charity. But in the new world all this is changed: "Love is fallen into discorde," and the ancient order is everywhere in confusion. Look at the clergy: instead of guiding their lives by the primitive standard, they follow the rule of simony, and hence arise schism and heresy. Some men say that these evils are caused by Fortune, but those who look deeper may see that good or bad fortune is the consequence of men's own conduct. By the light of Nebuchadnezzar's dream Gower proceeds to the conclusion that he lives in times on which "the ends of the world are come." The division and disorder he sees about him he believes to be the fruit of man's sin, which was the original cause both of the war of the elements, and of the civil war between body and soul. Would that some second Arion might arise to restore the discordant contraries once more to harmony!

And now no more
As for to speke of this matere,
Which none but only God may stere,
So were good if at this tyde
That every man upon his syde
Besought and prayed for the peace
Which is the cause of all increase,
Of worshippe, and of worldes welthe,
Of hertes reste and soules helthe.
Without peace stonde no thing good.
Forthy to Crist, which shed his blood
For peace, byseketh alle men,
Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen.

When he passes from his Prologue to the poem itself, Gower shifts his ground. He tells his readers that he has no hope of restoring the world to its right balance, and that he means to write about love, a word to which he now attaches a new sense. Love, through the body of the poem, is regarded as the great disturbing force among mankind; and the poet illustrates his doctrine

from his own experience. Without any attempt to produce verisimilitude by using the conventional machinery of dreams, after the manner of Chaucer and the French poets, Gower relates how, being in the agonies of love, he went out into the woods and met with Cupid and Venus, the former of whom, in the usual way, increased his suffering by transfixing him with a dart. Venus, he says, treated him with more compassion, ordering him to confess to her priest, Genius, who, first of all, explained to him how closely love was associated with the senses by the gates of sight and hearing, and then showed the connection between love and the Seven Deadly Sins, analysing them point by point, asking the penitent at each stage as to the state of his mind, and illustrating every answer by one or more stories. In this way seven out of the eight books which compose the poem are filled with tales: the seventh book is occupied with an abstract of the *Secretum Secretorum*, or the course of instruction supposed in the Middle Ages to have been given by Aristotle to Alexander. When Genius, in the course of the confession, has contrived to tell one hundred and twenty stories, the poet thinks it time to make a "supplication" to Venus, that his love may be requited as he deserves, or else that he may die. In answer to this prayer, Venus at first contents herself with a sermon. Old men, she says very wisely, have no business to be in love:—

> My sone, if that thou well bethought,
> This toucheth the, forgete it nought,
> The thing is torned into "was";
> The which was whilome grene gras
> Is welked heie as time now.[1]
> Forthy my counseil is that thow
> Remembre well how thou art olde.

This sage advice by no means avails to cure the poet of his malady; but he almost immediately perceives Cupid attended by "all the world of gentle folk that were whilome lovers"; among whom he observes such

[1] What was formerly green grass is now become withered hay.

Of love, and of his dedly hele,
Which no phisicien can hele;
For his nature is so divers
That it hath ever some travers,
Or of to moch or of to lite,
That plainly may no man delite,
But if him faile, or that or this.
But thilke Love which that is
Within a mannes herte affirmed,
And stont of Charite confirmed,
Such Love is goodly or to have,
Such Love may the body save,
Such Love may the soule amende,
The highe God such Love us sende
Forth with the remenaunt of grace,
So that above in thilke place,
Where restith Love and alle Pes,
Our joie may ben endéles.

The *Confessio Amantis* is an interesting example of the evolution of the mediæval epic style in England. The central conception whereby the series of tales is grouped round the Seven Deadly Sins appears to be suggested by the *Handlyng Synne* of Robert of Brunne. In that work, however, the tale plays only a subordinate part, being thrown in as a concession to the weakness of "lewd" men, to whom it might be otherwise difficult to impart the wholesome doctrine of the homily. The great original of compositions like Mannyng's is found in the "Dialogues" of Gregory the Great: their motives are primarily ecclesiastical; and most of the tales in the *Handlyng Synne* are derived from clerical sources, the works of Gregory himself, those of St. Basil, the *Acta Sanctorum*, and the *Vitæ Patrum*.

In Gower's day this predominantly didactic purpose in story-telling, so intimately associated with the discipline of the monastery, had become old-fashioned, if not quite obsolete, and his avowed motive of composition was different:—

But for men saine, and sothe it is,
That who that al of wisdom writ
It dulleth ofte a mannes wit
To hem that shall it all day rede;

Her eyen smal and depe set,
Her chekes ben with teres wet,
And rivelin[1] *as an empty skin*
Hangend down unto the chin,
Her lippes shrunken ben for age;
There was no grace in her visage,
Her front was narwe,[2] her lockes hore,
She loketh forth as doth a more.[3]

His slighter touches have often great brilliancy, as—

There was a lady the sliest
Of alle that men knewen tho,[4]
So olde she might unnethes go,
And was graundame to the dede.[5]

Two old men are thus characterised—

And as a busshe which is besnewed
Here berdes were hore and white.[6]

Sometimes this picturesque fancy clothes itself in allegory:—

Upon the bench sittend on high
With Avarice Usure I sigh,
Ful clothed of his owne suite,
Which after gold maketh chase and suite,
With his brocours that renne aboute,
Liche unto racches[7] in a route
Such lucre is nonne above ground
Which is nought of the racches found.
For whan they se beyete[8] sterte,
That shal hem in no wise asterte,[9]
But they it drive into the net,
Of lucre, which Usure hath set.

And the allegory is often marked by subtle conceit, as when the eye is described as the heart's cook in matters of love.[10]

---

[1] Wrinkled. [2] Her forehead was narrow. [3] A witch [4] Then.
[5] So old that she could scarcely go, and was grandam to the dead.—This image may have been suggested by the Mother of Death, a familiar figure in the Miracle Plays. See Sharp's *Dissertation on the Coventry Mysteries*, pp. 53-4.
[6] Their beards were as hoar and white as a bush covered with snow
[7] Hounds scenting. [8] What is acquired, profit. [9] Escape.
[10] Right as min eye with his loke
Is to min herte a lusty coke
Of Loves fode delicate.

while he himself acknowledges that his Seventh Book, on the *Secretum Secretorum*, has nothing to do with his subject. This book is in fact introduced either for the mere display of the writer's learning, or, more probably, to meet an objection that might be raised against the poem as a whole, for its want of direct religious purpose.

Gower thus stands midway between Robert of Brunne and Chaucer. He has passed beyond the stage of art in which a story is told primarily for the sake of the moral it conveys. Yet the moral is with him apparently quite as important as the tale, and, as he declares in his Prologue, he provides for the instruction as well as the amusement of his readers. We are still in the Middle Ages. Gower never approaches that direct imitation of nature, that dramatic portraiture of men and women, which makes the life of the *Canterbury Tales*. The idea of an action giving unity to a collection of varied narratives; of characters so disposed as to make the action at once interesting and progressive; and of such a relation between the character of the story-teller and the story, that the one may seem to speak in conformity with the natural course of events, and the other to suggest a natural moral; all this is beyond him.

Between Chaucer and Gower there is, in fact, all the difference that distinguishes the man of genius from the man of accomplishment. Yet Gower's poetical qualities, especially when compared with those of his immediate successors, are of a high order. He is a good story-teller, excelling particularly in picturesqueness of description. In the Story of Florent, which is the same in substance as that told by the Wife of Bath in the *Canterbury Tales*, his picture of the Loathly Lady is perhaps more vivid than Chaucer's:—

> Florent his woful hed up lifte,
> And sigh this vecche[1] where that she syt,
> Which was the lothliesté wyght
> That ever man cast on his eye.
> Her nase base,[2] her browes high,

[1] Saw this old woman (vecchia).

[2] Flat.

habit of placing the verb after the noun it governs, and it is possible that this inversion, which is frequent even in the verse of the eighteenth century, may be partly due to the necessities of rhyming verse. But the inversion of the order of the sense is often carried in Gower to excess, as in such a sentence as this:—

> And that I take into recorde
> Of every lond for his partie
> The common vois, which may not lie,
> Nought upon one but upon alle,
> It is that men now clepe and calle,
> And sain that regnes ben devided;

that is: "And to bear witness to that, I take, for its own part, the general voice of every land, which may not lie, for it is not only in one, but in all, that men cry out and exclaim and say that realms are divided."

Frequently a sentence beginning with one construction is concluded with another, as—

> But for men sain, and sothe it is,
> That who that al of wisdom writ,
> It dulleth ofte a mannes wit,

i.e. "But since men say, and truly, that when a man writes of nothing but wisdom, it often dulls his wit."

In his structure of the royal stanza, Gower models himself on the French, and often produces very musical effects, as—

> Upon myself this ilke tale come,
> How whilom Pan, which is the god of Kinde,
> With Love wrestled and was overcome,
> For ever I wrestle, and ever I am behinde,
> That I no strengthe in all min herte finde,
> Whereof that I may stonden any throwe,
> So far my wit with love is overthrowe

From what has been said it must be clear that, in the judgment of posterity, there can be no question of any rivalry between Chaucer and Gower. In the most characteristic quality of his genius, his dramatic power, Chaucer stands unapproachably alone among the poets of the period. In their capacity of literary trouvères,

Gower shows some power of imagining feeling dramatically in an ideal situation. Thus when the Loathly Lady asks Florent, in fulfilment of his promise, to take her for his wife :—

He wot nought what is best to sain,
And thought as he rode to and fro
That chese he mote one of the two—
Or for to take her to his wife,
Or elles for to lose his life;
And then he cast his avauntage,
That she was of so grete an age
That she may live but a while,
And thought to put her in an ile,
Where that no man her sholde knowe,
Til she with deth were overthrowe.

He is by no means without humour, and takes evident delight in the oddity of his learning. Aristotle's subjection to the power of love is thus described :—

I sigh then Aristotle also,
Whom that the quene of Greece al so
Hath bridled, that in thilke time
She made him such a silogime,
That he forgate all his logique.
There was none arte of his practique,
Through which it mighte ben excluded,
That he ne was fully concluded
To love, and did his obeisaunce.

The metrical style of Gower in his octosyllabic verse is nimble and fluent. Each of his lines contains, as a rule, eight syllables: the sentences, not unduly prolonged, end generally with the first rhyme of the couplet; sometimes, but seldom, in the middle of the verse. He employs, of course, many words which have become obsolete, but it is usually easy to gather his meaning. His syntax, however, shows much of the awkwardness to be expected from a musician who is master only of a rude instrument. He often fails to make his words follow the natural order of the thought, either because he is prevented by reminiscences of Anglo-Saxon grammar, or because he tries to imitate the Latin. He is in the

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both poets had certain common aims: each saw that, to make their native language a harmonious literary instrument, the best method was to refine it on French models. But Chaucer can claim priority of invention: he had translated the *Romaunt of the Rose*, written the *Book of the Duchess*, and adapted *Troilus and Criseyde* before Gower began to compose in English. Gower on his side is to be credited with having made the first collection of tales in metrical English, and he deserves high praise for the number and variety of his stories, and for the tuneful facility of his narrative style. He was also the first to arrange his miscellaneous epic materials by means of a central design. But in this respect he was himself an imitator, and the plan of the *Confessio Amantis* cannot compare in invention and propriety with the splendid scheme of the Canterbury pilgrimage. On the whole, making due allowance for his talents and accomplishments, it is not unjust to describe him as a poet of the school of Chaucer.

If Chaucer stands so far in advance of one who, in his own day, and long afterwards, was reckoned as his rival, a still greater interval separates him from the poets who were proud to avow themselves his disciples. Chaucer died in, or about, 1400, and through almost the whole of that century poetical imagination, thought, and invention, seem, in England at all events, to have been asleep. And not only so, but the metrical system which Chaucer had established, imperfectly understood by his successors, fell into decay, so that, between his death and the advent of Surrey, the language suffered a distinct loss of harmony. Yet poor as they are in art, the works of Lydgate and Occleve, the chief English poets of the first half of the fifteenth century, have a certain interest for the historian of poetry. In the first place they show that, while the poetical impulse of the fourteenth century has been completely exhausted, the literary taste which it created survives. The number of readers largely increases; the patron begins to appear; the English language is recognised as having a "rhetoric" of its own; and poets

receive commissions to execute metrical works in it, just as the painter is engaged to beautify by his art the shrine or the altar.

Again the slackening tide of imagination in society at large gives more opportunity for the expression of personal interests, and a striking feature in the poems of both Lydgate and Occleve is the frequent introduction of autobiographical passages. Finally, their system of versification—and particularly Lydgate's—though rude and inharmonious, is, for that very reason, historically instructive, as showing the natural forces which were preparing the language for the metrical changes made by the poets of the sixteenth century.

John Lydgate—"Dan Johan" as he is called by Shirley—was born, probably about 1370,[1] certainly at Lydgate near Newmarket, from which place he derived his name, and which he mentions more than once in his poems, in rather a disparaging manner.[2] An idle boy, who caused his friends much trouble and expense while at school, he was placed at the early age of fifteen in the Benedictine Monastery at Bury St. Edmunds, where he spent his noviciate.[3] In 1388 he there received the four lower orders of the Church; he was ordained deacon in 1393, and priest in 1397.[4] There is some evidence to show that from Bury he had been sent for study to Oxford, possibly to Gloucester Hall (now Worcester College) which was connected with the Benedictine Order.[5] One of his biographers states that after finishing his education in England "he went

[1] Lydgate tells us in his Prologue to the *Story of Thebes* that it was written when he was "nie fiftie yere of age," and this must have been between the years 1420 and 1422. For all facts relating to Lydgate the reader may usefully refer to the edition of the *Temple of Glass*, published by the Early English Text Society, and edited by Herr J. Schick; one of those admirable monographs for which students of our early literature are so deeply indebted to the industry of German scholars and their English collaborators.

[2] I was borne in Lydgate
Where Bacchus licour doth full scarsely flite
Lydgate, *Falls of Princes*.
Have me excused, I was born at Lydgate.

[3] See his *Testament* in the edition of his poems by Halliwell, pp. 254-59.

[4] *Temple of Glass* (Schick), lxxxvii.

[5] *Ibid.* lxxxviii.-ix.

to Paris to learn the languages"[1] and we know from his own account that during his life he had travelled far.[2] Tradition, of a very shadowy kind, enrols him as a member of the University of Padua;[3] but we have no positive evidence of his being abroad till 1426, when he himself states that he was employed at Paris to translate into English a poetical pedigree, composed in French to prove that Henry VI. was the true king of France.[4] We may suppose at any rate that, after entering the monastery and while completing his education, he discovered that he possessed powers of versification; and it may further be fairly concluded that his first attempts at composition were of an allegorical kind. Poetry of this class was in considerable vogue in the first years of the fifteenth century in consequence of the reaction, headed by Christine de Pisan and the Chancellor Gerson, against John de Meung's contribution to the *Roman de la Rose*. Lydgate's allegorical poems include among others *Flour of Curtesie*, *Temple of Glass*, *Assemble of Gods*, *Court of Sapience*, *Reason and Sensuality*: in most of these he doubtless followed his fancy; but one or two, notably the *Temple of Glass*, may have been written to order; all of them were probably produced before 1411.

After that date a fresh current of taste began to manifest itself. At the command of Prince Henry, afterwards Henry V., Lydgate undertook in 1412 the translation of Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Trojana*. The future conqueror of Agincourt had perhaps no strong taste for the insipidities of allegorical poetry, and preferred the action and adventure of romance. At any rate Lydgate's pro-

[1] Bale, *Scriptorum Britanniæ Summarium*, p. 202 (1548).

[2] I have been offte in dyvers londys,
And in many dyvers Regiouns
Have eskapyd fro my foois hondys,
In Citees, Castellys, and in touns;
Among folk of sundry naciouns
Wente ay forth, and took noon hede.
Temple of Glass, p. lxxxix.

[3] *Ibid.* p. lxxxix.

[4] *Ibid.* p. xciii.

ductive powers were turned in the latter direction during that king's reign. The 30,000 lines which filled the *Troy Book* occupied him, as he tells us, till the eighth year after the coronation of Henry V., *i.e.* till 1420.[1] Scarcely was this task finished when he was required by another patron to condense, from the epic of Statius, the companion *Story of Thebes*, a comparatively short work, which, at his rapid rate of composition, would not have taken him more than a year, and would therefore have left him time to write for the chivalry of the day the story of *Guy of Warwick*, before his election as Prior of Hatfield in 1423.

Lydgate's work now begins once more to indicate a turn in the tide of taste. During the long minority of Henry VI., accompanied as it was by the decline of the English power in France, a demand for reading of a devotional kind seems to have sprung up among the nobility, which the Monk of Bury was frequently called upon to satisfy. Summoned to Paris by the Earl of Warwick, as has been already said, to turn into English Callot's poetical pedigree of the young king, the poet was in the same year commissioned by the Earl of Salisbury to translate the first part of De Guileville's *Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*, an enormous allegory extending to 22,000 lines. As if this labour of Hercules were not sufficient, the unfortunate man was next set by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, the Mæcenas of the day, to make an English version of Boccaccio's *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum*, some "tragedies" of which had already been transferred by Chaucer into his "Monk's Tale." The prospect of this fresh penance seems to have been almost too much for Lydgate's endurance. His description of his state of mind, when anticipating his toils, reminds

[1] And tyme complet of this translacyon
Was a thousande and foure hondred yere,
And twenty nere—I knowe it out of drede,
The eyghte yere, by computacyon
Suyng after the coronacyon
Of hym—. . . Herry the fyfthe.
Temple of Glass (Schick), p. ci.

us of Pope's nightmares, after first embarking on the translation of the *Iliad:*[1]—

> Thus my self remembrying on this boke
> It to translate how I had undertake,
> Ful pale of chere, astonied in my loke,
> Myn hand gan tremble, my penne I felte quake.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I stode chekmate for feare when I gan see
> In my way how littel I had runne.

Considering that he was between sixty and seventy years of age, and that his work ran to 36,000 lines, these apprehensions are very intelligible. Nevertheless his indomitable industry, and the aid of a French translation, carried him through. But he can have had little time to attend to his religious duties; and this may have been the opinion of his fraternity, for in 1430 a new prior is found in command at Hatfield, and in 1434 Lydgate obtained a "Dimissio" from that monastery, and returned to Bury, where he spent the remainder of his days. The year before his return he had been commissioned by the abbot to write the *Legend of SS. Edmund and Fremund,* in honour of the visit of Henry VI. to the monastery, and here in 1438, among the scenes of his early years, he completed his gigantic labours on the *Falls of Princes.* His wits, as he says in his *Life of Albon and Amphabel,* composed in 1439, were now "fordulled," yet the poor monk, patient as one of Curll's poets, continued to place his pen at the service of those who might require it, and, according to Stowe, was employed to write the verses for the pageant in honour of Queen Margaret's entry into London in 1445. A small yearly pension had been granted to him, and payment of it is recorded as late as 1446,[2] soon after which year he must

[1] Compare Pope's confession to Spence (*Anecdotes,* p. 218):—"What terrible moments does one feel after one has engaged for a large work! In the beginning of my translating the *Iliad* I wished any one would hang me a hundred times. It sat so heavily on my mind at first that I often used to dream of it, and do sometimes still."

[2] Perhaps, as Herr Schick ingeniously suggests, in response to the request made to Duke Humphrey of Gloucester at the close of his *Falls of Princes*—

> Trusting ageynwards your liberal largesse
> Of this quotidyan shall releven me
>
> . . . . .
>
> Hope seyd, ye, my lord, should have compassion,
> Of royale pitye support me in mine age.

have died, literally pen in hand, while in the midst of a translation of the *Secretum Secretorum*.[1]

The above is evidently a record of the life of a literary purveyor, or hack; and viewed as such, the works of Lydgate are of some value in marking the fluctuations of poetical taste in the first half of the fifteenth century. Beyond this they have little merit. In respect of invention and power of design he seems to have been altogether wanting. He regarded himself as the follower and disciple of Chaucer, but he shows no real insight into the genius of that great poet; and when he calls him his "maister" he means no more than that he is imitating his external forms of expression. Of his allegorical poems, as represented by his *Temple of Glass*, something more will be said in the next chapter, but considering him mainly in his capacity of story-teller, his deficiencies as an original poet may be best illustrated from his *Story of Thebes*. In this he follows the footsteps of Chaucer with feeble servility. The "story" is preceded by a Prologue —a kind of sequel to the *Canterbury Tales*—in which, after copying Chaucer's manner of fixing the date, Lydgate describes how he fell in with the pilgrims at an inn in Canterbury; and then, having recapitulated his master's portraits of some of the leading characters, proceeds to relate how the host bade him tell a story. The tale he told was of course the *Story of Thebes*, and this is a mere abstract of the *Thebais*,—or rather of a French version of that poem,—just as the "Knight's Tale" is an abstract of Boccaccio's *Teseide*. But there is all the difference in the manner of making an abstract. While Chaucer alters, invents, improves, and omits, showing at every touch the working of an independent judgment, Lydgate makes his digest of the *Thebais* in the spirit of a lawyer's clerk, depriving a poem, not very interesting in itself, of its life

[1] His own portion of this translation ends with the line—

Deth al consumyth, which may not be denied,

after which a new translator, Bennet Burgh, appears upon the scene with the announcement in the MS.: "Here dyed this translator and nobyl poete. And the yonge folwere gan his prologe on this wyse."

and character with such success, that his version of the "story" resembles his original in about the same degree as the chronicle of Eutropius resembles the history of Livy.

Lydgate's most agreeable poems are certainly those in which he speaks about himself. In his *Testament* and his *London Lackpenny* he has given us some suggestive glimpses of his life and character;[1] and he will sometimes rest in the midst of his translations, to relieve his weariness by a moment's gossip with the reader. These green oases are so welcome, in the midst of the desert of dulness surrounding them, that the traveller, refreshed by the little spring of garrulous doggerel, is inclined to celebrate it as a fountain of pure poetry. This however is mistaken gratitude.

What is really interesting and historically valuable in the art of Lydgate arises from his own incapacity as a poet. He is an exceedingly lame versifier.[2] Yet he was the poetical heir of Chaucer, who had left him an instrument admirably tuned for the purposes of metrical expression; and his failure to make use of this is only intelligible when we consider the external forces which were co-operating to alter the character of the language. Chaucer's system of versification, though perfectly scientific, was artificial, and necessarily provisional. Its leading principle was the adaptation of the grammatical forms, surviving in the Southern dialect of the English language, to the metrical forms used in the French language; in other words, Chaucer defined his verse not only by the number of accents, but by the number of syllables. This method was sound both theoretically and practically, and was made the easier both from the frequent naturalisation of French words in English, and from the fact that in both languages the final *e*, in a very large number of words, was still retained as the symbol of a more ancient form of inflection. It is plain, however,

[1] *Minor Poems* (Halliwell's edition), pp. 103, 232.

[2] It is fair to Lydgate to say that Gray's estimate of his merits is more favourable. The reader will find an admirable criticism on his works in Mathias' edition of Gray's Works, vol. ii. pp. 55-80. Gray has, however, modernised the text by the occasional insertion of syllables so as to make Lydgate's verse seem much smoother than it really is.

that there must have been difficulties in the deliberate application of a foreign metrical system to English, and Chaucer himself shows us that he was conscious of occasional failure. In his invocation to Apollo (imitated from Dante) at the opening of the third book of the *House of Fame*, he says:—

> But, for the rime is light and lewde,
> Yet make it somewhat agreable,
> *Though some verse fayle in a sillable*
> And that I do no diligence
> To shewe crafte but sentence.

He also speaks deprecatingly of his technical performance in his Prologue to the "Man of Law's Tale," laying stress there, as in the passage just cited, on the predominant importance of the subject matter.[1] On the whole, however, Chaucer's experiment was eminently successful. He had an exquisite ear for rhythm, and his execution improved so much with practice that, in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, page after page may be read, on his own principle of scansion, without shock to the sense of harmony.

But his system was by no means easily intelligible to the mass of his countrymen. His own verses to his scrivener express at once his anxiety as to the orthography of the MS, so necessary for technical purposes, and his indignation at the copyist's want of intelligent appreciation.[2] When he died, though his successors continued to regard his verse with admiring envy, the secret of his harmonious composition seemed to have been buried with him, and the metrical system which he had so scientifically constructed fell rapidly into ruins.

[1] But Chaucer (though he can but lewedly
On metres and on riming craftily)
Hath sayd hem in swiche English as he can.
Canterbury Tales, 4467.

[2] Adam Scrivener, if ever it thee befall
Boece or Troilus for to write new,
Under thy long lockes thou maist have the scall,
But after my making thou write more trew,
So ofte a day I must thy worke renew,
It to correct and eke to rubbe and scrape,
And al is thorow thy negligence and rape.

It is true that some scholars, who have industriously analysed the verse of Lydgate, believe it to have been built on a regular principle, and maintain that the numerous metrical licenses it exhibits are the fruits of deliberate purpose. For my own part I believe that these can be explained in a much simpler manner. There can be no doubt that the English line of five accents, like the French verse of ten syllables, on which it is modelled, and like the Italian hendecasyllable, is ultimately derived from the Latin iambic senarius, curtailed of one of its feet in consequence of the necessities of rhyme.[1] The parent verse admits of no irregularity, and, in adapting the youthful European languages to the old standard, we may be fairly certain that the poets would have aimed at pruning away all roughness and excrescence. The late verse of Chaucer, at any rate, shows far fewer variations from the regularity of the normal type than the earlier verse. On the other hand, in Lydgate's ten-syllable verse, the number of irregularly constructed lines is very large. And though the deviations from the ideal standard can all be classified in distinct groups, the evidence seems to me to show that they are the natural effects of three causes,—a defective ear, ignorance of the grammatical principles on which Chaucer's metrical system was founded, and the gradual disappearance of the final *e*, representing the old inflections, before the tendencies to contraction prevailing in all oral language.

Lydgate's poems abound in confessions of his want of metrical skill, of which the following may be taken as an example:—

> And trouthe of metre I sette also a-syde,
> For of that art I hadde as tho no guyde
> Me to reduce, when I went a-wronge:
> I tooke none hede nouther of shorte nor longe.[2]

Nevertheless he imitated, as he best could, the scientifically constructed verse of Chaucer, and, if we may take his expressions literally, he would appear to have submitted

[1] See pp. 73-74.

[2] *Temple of Glass* (Schick), p. lvi.

his own compositions to the correction of the elder poet.[1] But he was well aware that he did not possess like Chaucer the advantage of a mastery over the Southern dialect, which was not only the depositary of the literary traditions of the English language, but also offered the closest analogies to the structure of the French. He asks his readers in one place to excuse his lack of art in consideration of his having been born at Lydgate; and in another place he expands this apology, ascribing his defects to his extraction from a part of England where the ancient language had been most corrupted by the mixture of foreign, in other words Scandinavian, elements.[2] While Lydgate therefore sought to carry on the literary tradition which Chaucer had established, and which he himself enthusiastically admired, he was conscious at once of lacking the scientific knowledge necessary for his purpose, and also of the overmastering influence of the common or vulgar speech, which pressed in on all sides upon the delicately organised and highly artificial system of metrical language bequeathed to him by his master. Hence his verse shows a constant tendency to break away from the normal iambic standard, and to revert to ruder rhythms, prevalent in the language before Chaucer introduced his improvements.

The normal standard of the measure, as Chaucer conceived it, is clearly a line of ten syllables with five accents falling on the even syllables, and with a cæsura or pause falling after any syllable between the third and the seventh. So long, however, as two strongly-accented syllables do not fall together, this movement of the verse may be varied by the substitution of a trochee for an iambus.[3] Now as the tradition of Anglo-Saxon rhythm

[1] And Chaucer now, alas, is not alyve
Me to reforme, or to be my rede,
For lacke of whom slower is my spede
Temple of Glass, p. xci.

[2] I know myself most naked in all artes,
My comyn vulgar eeke moost interrupte;
And I conversaunte and borne in the partes
Where my natyfe language is mooste corrupte,
And with moost sondry tonges mixt and rupte.
Prologue to *Court of Sapience*.

[3] As in Pope's line—

Die of a rose in aromatic pain.

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[3] As in Pope's line—

Die of | a róse | in ár omát ic páin.

was to measure solely by accent, it is natural to expect that when English poets, using the new metre without completely comprehending its character, departed from the iambic type, their variations would mainly affect the number of syllables in the line. And this is just what we find in practice. Chaucer's verse is sometimes redundant, sometimes defective in the number of syllables; though, as I have said, his aberrations from the fixed standard,—which by his own admission arise from his attention having been directed rather to matter than form,—are comparatively rare in his late work. Lydgate violates the law almost as frequently as he observes it. When his verse is redundant the excess generally occurs in the cæsura, as—

> I fónd a wíkęet | and éntrid ín as fást.
> There saúgh I ál|so | the sórow͡ of Pálamóun.
> A mán to lóv|e | to hís confúsioún.
> So mých of rés|on | was cómpast ín hir hért.
> Yeve únto Vén|us, | and tó the déité.

When the verse is defective the syllable is wanting either in the first foot, as—

> Ún|to hír and tó her éxcellénce.
> Óf | musíke, ay díd his bísynés.
> Hélp | of ríght in jói and nót in wó:

or in the foot following the cæsura, as—

> That foúndid wás || ás | bi líklynésse.
> For óf pité || pléin|li íf she félt.
> And thérwithál || Vén|us ás me thoúght
> Towárd this mán || fúl | benýgnelí.
>
> Fore wéll thou wóst || yíf | I shál not feíne
> Withoúte spéch thou máist no mérci háve:
> For whó that wíl || óf | his préve peíne.
> Conquérid wás || fírst | when ít was soúght.

Redundancy of syllable is easily explained by the character of the Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, which allowed the voice to *slur* the unimportant syllables between

the successive measures. Contrary as it is to the genius of the iambic movement, the license can hardly be reckoned —what some scholars have reckoned it—a beauty in verses meant to be read; and Chaucer, in his latest works, introduces it very sparingly, though, as was to be expected, it is common in Shakespeare and other Elizabethan writers, who composed their verse with a view to its being spoken. But, in the defective line, the mutilation of the first iambus, and the harsh collision of strongly accented syllables after the cæsura, can be ascribed to nothing but an imperfect ear or want of metrical skill. The blot, when it is found in Chaucer, doubtless proceeds from sense being attended to before sound; and Lydgate seems to think his master's occasional shortcomings in this respect a sufficient excuse for his own discords.[1] These, however, are so frequent as to indicate that he was unconscious of their presence, and his natural tendency to offend was aggravated by the irresistible movement of language itself. The Southern dialect, literary and artificial, remained fixed in the midst of the constant change that was proceeding in the spoken tongue, through loss of inflections and contractions of sound; so that, while the grammatical forms which it preserved were extremely convenient for poets employing the iambic rhythm, they by no means always corresponded with the actual pronunciation of words. Chaucer, writing in this dialect, which he understood scientifically, and adapting it to the laws of French prosody, with which he was also well acquainted, usually contrives to preserve a fairly strict conformity between grammar and metre. Lydgate, following in his steps, was often confused between the native tendencies of his Suffolk speech, the literary rules of the Southern dialect, and the requirements of a metre which he only imperfectly understood. A double usage, some-

[1] He writes as though Chaucer had looked over his own verses; but he is probably referring to Chaucer's habits of self-criticism —

> My maister Chaucer, that founde many a spot,
> Hym liste not pinche, nor grucche at every blot,
> Nor meve hym silf to perturbe his reste
> I have herd telle, but seide alweie the best.—*Troy Book.*

Quoted in Schick's edition of *Temple of Glass*, p. xcii.

times determined by the laws of grammar, sometimes by the customs of speech, is accordingly found in his verses, of which the following will serve as examples :—

Grammatical form preserving the final *e*	In name of tho that trouth in lovë ment
Customary oral form suppressing the final *e*	Thurugh hevenli fire of love that is eterne To help al tho that bië love so dere.
Grammatical form	In vertu oonli his youthë to cherice
Customary oral form	That were constrayned in hir tender youth(e) And in childhode, as it is ofte couth(e).
Grammatical form	On which of you his trouthë first dothe breke
Customary oral form	Of trouth(e) to yow be bounde and undertake.
Grammatical form	Within the Estres, and gan awhilë tarie
Customary oral form	To love and servë, while that I have breath.

The following couplet is peculiarly instructive :—

Ful covertli to curen al hir smert,
And shew the contrarie outward of her hert.

For in the first line we have in "curen" the old grammatical ending of the infinitive *en*, which is dropped in the second line in "shew"; and it also seems plain that in the rhyming words, which, grammatically written, would be "herte" and "smerte," the *e* has become mute. This constant instinct in Lydgate to suppress the inflecting *e* would naturally have made considerable havoc among the dissyllabic words available for the iambic movement; and, coupled with his bad ear and his Saxon tendency to measure the verse solely by the number of accents, and without reference to the number of the syllables, is, I think, sufficient to account for the numerous discords which prevail in his rhythm. He writes best in the royal or seven-lined stanza, where he is, so to speak, in stays. Here he occasionally produces a passage showing signs of art, especially when he presses his proverbs—of which he is fond and has a large supply—into the service of antithesis :—

For white is whiter, if it be set by blak,
And swete is swettir after bitternes,
And falshode ever is drive and put a-bak

Where trouthe is roted withoute doubelnes;
Withoute prefe may be no sikernes
Of love or hate; and therefor of yow two
Shall love be more that it was bought with wo[1]

When the stream of his verse is not kept within limits, his sentences are apt to trickle on aimlessly, and frequently lose themselves without ever finding a grammatical outlet. Feeble expletives and conventional phrases, of course, abound in him; but the same defects are noticeable in Chaucer, and neither the one poet nor the other ought to be harshly blamed for yielding to the temptations incident to all youthful art.

Thomas Occleve, the only other considerable English poet in the first half of the fifteenth century, was born at Hockliffe in Bedfordshire in 1368 or 1369, and was therefore nearly of the same age as Lydgate.[2] Bred up for the priesthood,[3] it is probable that he may have taken some of the minor orders of the Church, but, altering his course for some reason, he entered the office of the Privy Seal at the early age of nineteen. This department of the State stood midway between the King's Signets and the Great Seal, taking warrants from the former and delivering them to the latter for the payment of all grants and the issue of patents. The work, which consisted mainly of copying, was naturally performed exclusively by men who had received an ecclesiastical education, and it brought Occleve into contact with many persons of importance who were engaged in the business of the State After twelve years' service he was granted an annuity of £10, which was paid him till 1409, when it was changed to one of £13:6:8. This he continued to receive with more or less regularity till 1425, after which year he

[1] *Temple of Glass*, 1250.

[2] In his *Dialog* written in 1421 or 1422, he says:—

Of age am I fifty winter and thre.

His name also appears to have been written "Hoccleve." Full particulars about his life may be found in Mr. Furnivall's careful and exhaustive edition of his Minor Poems, published by the Early English Text Society

[3] I whilom thought
Have ben a priest; now past is the rass.
Occleve, *De Regimine Principum*

was pensioned off with a grant for life on the Priory of Southwick. The date of his death is uncertain, but from one of his surviving poems it appears that he was still alive in 1448.[1]

The motives of Occleve's compositions are of various kinds. Discovering, perhaps in the intervals of his civil employment, that he had a turn for versification, he seems to have sought instruction in the art from Chaucer, who in his declining years would always have been readily found in the house which he occupied at Westminster. He felt the influence of the feudal reaction in the early years of the fifteenth century, and translated, or rather adapted without acknowledgment in his *Epistle to Cupid*, Christine de Pisan's *L'Epître au Dieu d'Amours*, a performance which, oddly enough, appears to have been regarded by the sensitive feminine critics of the day as a reflection on their sex.

He also shared with more than ordinary fervour in the orthodox reaction against the doctrines of Wycliffe. In two poems addressed to Henry V. soon after his accession he congratulates the country on being under a genuinely Catholic monarch, and he appeals to the Knights of the Garter to be instant in the slaying of heretics.[2] Another poem, full of invective and bitterness, is dedicated to Sir John Oldcastle, the famous Lollard, whom he exhorts to recant his errors, and to furnish loyal assistance to the king in his French expedition.[3] Four or five compositions in honour of the Virgin Mary show the enthusiasm with which he committed himself to the main current of feeling then shaping the course of Catholic devotion.[4]

But Occleve's most characteristic poems are, as is also the case with Lydgate, those which take the form of autobiography. He possessed a certain vein of original humour, and probably found his account in amusing the men of position, on whom he depended, by verses written in the character of half-moralist, half-buffoon, burlesquing

[1] *Balade to my Gracious Lord of York* (Furnivall, p. 49).
[2] Hoccleve's Works (Furnivall, i. 39, 41).
[3] *Ibid.* 8.
[4] *Ibid.* i. 43, 52, 67.

his own character, and describing the manners of the time. In his *Male Regle*, composed in 1406, he has left a rather minute and disparaging portrait of himself in his capacity of Civil Servant. By no means zealous in the discharge of his official duties, he represents himself—as Lydgate paints his own life in the monastery—spending whatever of his time and substance he could on good wine and festive company. He rose, he says, like his fellow-clerks at nine o'clock in the morning, and proceeded to his work by water from Chester Inn (near Somerset House) to Westminster. This habit of his furnished him with a text for solemn moralising, for he confesses it to have been the effect of pure vanity, which made him unable to resist the solicitations of the boatmen, who called him "Mister," and so obtained his custom.[1] Vanity again, quite as much as inclination, attracted him to taverns, where he spent much of the time that was due to his public work.[2] He begs his readers to take warning by his sad experience, and to consult the *Book of Nature of Beasts*, wherein they may see how mermaids entice shipmen, a fact of natural history which he illustrates by the respectable example of Ulysses and the Sirens. One advantage, however, he tells them, with the humour peculiar to him, he possessed in the midst of his dissipation :—

Oon avantage in this cas I have,
I was so ferd with any man to fighte,
Cloos kepte I me; no man durste I deprave

[1] Other than "maister" called was I revere
Among this meynee, in myn audience;
Methoghte I was y-maad a man for evere,
So tikeled me that nyce reverence,
That it me made larger of despense
Than that I thoght have ben. O flaterie!
The guyse of thy traiterous diligence
Is folk to mescheef haasten and to hie.

[2] Wher was a gretter myster eke than y?
Or bet aqwentyd at Westmynster Yate,
Among the taverneres namely
And cookes when I cam erly or late?
I pynchid nat at hem in myn acate (buying),
But paied hem as that they axe wolde,
Wherefor I was the welcomer algate
And for a verray gentil man y-holde.

But rouningly; I spak no thyng on highte,
And yet my wil was good if that I mighte
For lettynge of my manly cowardyse,
That ay of strookes impressid the wighte
So that I durste medlen in no wyse.[1]

It is probable that the popularity of *La Male Regle*, arising out of its quaint and novel vein of personal humour, encouraged the author to make fresh attempts in the same style. The collection of his poems at any rate contains several burlesque appeals—all partaking more or less of the nature of Odes to Impecuniosity—to different patrons for dinners, presents of money, or the payment of arrears of salary. Personal experience also furnishes the basis of the Prologue to his *De Regimine Principum*, a poem written for the edification of Henry V. before his accession to the throne, wherein an old beggar is made to perform for Occleve those offices of father confessor, which Genius performs for Gower in the *Confessio Amantis*.

The poems in which this autobiographical motive is most strongly developed are his *Complaint* and *Dialogue* written in 1421. In 1416 he was unhappy enough to lose his senses for a time; and these compositions describe, with touches of real pathos, and of that nature which never loses its interest, his sorrows and anxieties after his recovery. In the former, he relates how his old friends, when they met him in the street, turned their heads another way; and how he overheard what people said about him. Some declared his malady would return: when he heard them speak like this his face would glow with trouble and fear. Others said that he looked like "a wild steer," or noticed that, when he talked to them, his feet were always "waving to and fro," and that his eyes constantly wandered. Then he would go home and look in the glass, endeavouring to form a judgment about himself. Comforted for a moment, he would reflect that "men in

[1] I was so much afraid of fighting with any man that I kept to myself; I durst disparage no man except in a whisper; I spoke nothing out loud; and yet I had will enough to do so if my natural cowardice had not prevented me, which impressed me so much with the fear of blows that I durst not in any wise meddle.

their own case ben blind all day"; he would therefore resolve to suffer in silence and was even afraid to show himself out of doors. All this he writes in his *Complaint*. He has scarcely finished it when a friend looks in to whom he reads his composition. A *Dialogue* follows, in which the friend earnestly dissuades him from publishing it, arguing that people will have forgotten all about his illness, and that the *Complaint* will only bring it back to their recollection; moreover, if he begins to write again, his malady will certainly return. To all this Occleve turns a deaf ear, declaring his intention of publishing his *Confessions*, and of translating a Latin treatise, called *Scito Mori*. Seeing him resolved, his friend goes upon a fresh tack, and bids him, in God's name, write and publish what he will. On the poet asking him to suggest a subject, the other advises him to write a story in honour of Woman, to make amends for his *Epistle to Cupid*, which, however unreasonably, had given offence to the sex. Occleve assenting writes the story of *Jereslaus' Wife*, the original of which he found in the *Gesta Romanorum*; and to this he adds his translation of the *Scito Mori*, and (at the request of his friend) another tale, *Jonathas and Fellicula*, also taken from the *Gesta*.

He thus obtains, after the example of Chaucer and Gower, a framework for his little group of stories and moralisations. Poor as his scheme is, and unworthy to be mentioned with the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, it is not altogether wanting in a vein of original invention, which, so far, raises it above the lifeless allegorical machinery of the *Confessio Amantis*. Through the crude and inartistic conception we can discern gleams of the dramatic spirit which gives animation to Pope's unrivalled *Epistle to Arbuthnot*. Generally speaking, Occleve may be described as an amiable and garrulous poet, qualified to discharge the functions of the trouvère, in so far as these consisted in stooping to amuse the great at the poet's own expense; and possessing powers of versification just sufficient to obtain him distinction and patronage, because he was fortunate enough to live in an age when those who could write the

English language were few, and those who were anxious to read it were many and liberal.

Occleve avows that he learned the art of writing in metre from Chaucer, whom he regarded with infinite admiration as the glory of the new English tongue.[1] He claims to have known the great poet better than any man, and implies that the latter did what he could to improve his verses.[2]

It is indeed evident that, like Lydgate, Occleve found as much difficulty in composing in the new English, as if it had been a foreign tongue; and he too is full of apologies to his patrons for the rudeness of his performance.[3] He learned from his master to avoid those harsh collisions of accent which make the verses of Lydgate so unmusical; but, though his lines generally contain the correct number of syllables, this success is obtained at the expense of the accent, which is constantly thrown on weak places. In the first fifteen stanzas of *The Complaynte of the Virgin Mary* the following examples of this defect occur:—

And the tetés that gaf to sowken eek
The Sone of God which ón hy hangith heer.

And seint Anné, my modir dere also.

Eek thee to sowke on my briestés gaf I,
Thee norisshyng fairé and tendrely.

And maketh á wrongfúl disseverance.

---

[1] But weylaway! so is myn herte wo,
That the honour of Englyssh tonge is dede,
Of which I wont was han conseil and rede.
De Regimine Principum, st. 280.

[2] My dere maistir—God his soule quyte!—
And fadir Chaucer fayn wolde have me taught,
But I was dul, and lerned lite or naught.
Ibid. 297.

[3] For Lydgate see p. 327, note 2. Occleve, writing to the Duke of Bedford (*Works*, Furnivall, p. 57), says:—

I drede lest that my maister Massy,
That is of fructuous intelligence,
Whan he beholdeth how unconningly
My boke is metrid, how raw my sentence,
How feeble eek been my colours, his prudence
Shall son encombrid been of my folie.

That alle folk see and beholde it may.

As thow were an evil and wikked wight.

Thy name Pilat hath put in Scripture.

Sone, if thou haddest a fadir lyvynge.

That is to say, taking this poem as an average specimen, the number of lines in Occleve's poems, in which the accent falls on a weak syllable, would amount to about ten per cent. In his use of metres he follows Chaucer, but confines himself almost exclusively to two measures, namely that which was afterwards called the royal stanza, consisting of seven lines of five accents each, with the rhymes disposed as follows, *a b a b b c c*; and the stanza of eight lines with the following disposition of rhymes, *a b a b b c b c*. The only feature of originality he shows is in his use of dialogue in the royal stanza, and it is interesting to observe the manner in which so early a writer meets the difficulties attendant on this mode of composition On the whole, his style exhibits a good deal of dramatic energy and vivacity, as may be judged from the following stanzas, in which his friend is remonstrating with him against publishing his *Complainte*:—

"That I shall saye shal be of gode entente:
Hast thow mayde this compleynte foorth to goo
Among the peple?" "Ye, frend, so I mente,
What els?" "Nay, Thomas, ware, do not soo!
Yf thow be wyse of that matter hoo,
Reherse thow it not, ne it wake;
Kepe all that cloos for thyn honour's sake.

"How it stood with thee, layde is all aslepe,[1]
Men have forgete it; it is out of mynd.
That thou towche thereof I not me kepe;[2]
Let be; that rede I, for I canot find
O[3] man to speke of it; in as good a kynde
As thow hast stode among them on this day
Standyst thow now."[4] "A nay," quod I, "nay, nay."

[1] It is all laid to sleep how it stood with thee.
[2] I would not have thee touch on it.
[3] One.
[4] Thou standest now in as good a position as thou hast stood among men before this day.

It will be observed that, like Gower, when he is writing in dialogue, Occleve naturally runs into inversions. In the foregoing passage he does so, plainly, from the difficulty of preserving the natural order of the sentences in rhyme; that is to say, he fixes his rhymes before he forms his sentence. Nevertheless it is to be remembered, as has been remarked before, that the Anglo-Saxon syntax favoured this manner of writing, which Occleve sometimes employs when there is no necessity for him to do so. For example, he writes: "A riotous person I was and forsake";[1] a line which would certainly have run better if the words had followed the order of the thought: "I was a riotous person and forsake"; "If that a leche curyd had me so";[2] when it was evidently open to him to write "me had curyd."

In a word, the syntax of Occleve, as well as the prosody of Lydgate, shows the tendency of the native Anglo-Saxon element to revolt against those foreign laws of grammar and harmony, which had been imposed on the English language by the cultivated genius of Chaucer.

[1] *Complaint*, 67. [2] *Dialog*, 85.

NOTE ON "SPECULUM MEDITANTIS"

Since the publication of the first edition of this volume in 1895 the ingenuity and research of Mr. G. C. Macaulay of Trinity College, Cambridge, has discovered that, though Gower's work is no longer to be found with the above title, the poem itself actually exists under the name *Mirour de l'Omme*. It consists of about 29,000 lines of octosyllabic *French* verse in twelve-line stanzas, and is a religious allegory on the warfare of the Devil and the Seven Deadly Sins, with their progeny, against the Soul of Man, and the defence made by the seven opposing Virtues. With this is combined a satire on the various ranks of society as existing in the poet's own day, concluding with a life of the Virgin and an appeal to her for assistance. See Mr. Macaulay's edition of Gower published by the Clarendon Press in 1899-1902.

CHAPTER IX

THE PROGRESS OF ALLEGORY IN ENGLISH POETRY

ALLEGORY in the literature of the Middle Ages presents itself under three aspects: (1) As a philosophical method of interpreting the phenomena of nature; (2) As the abstracting process of the mind which embodies itself in the rhetorical figure of Personification; (3) As a specific form of poetry.

1. The allegorical method of interpretation is duly explained by Dante in his epistle to Can Grande conveying the dedication of the *Divine Comedy*. It need hardly be said that it is employed continuously through that poem, but there is a special reference to it in a speech of Beatrice, touching the abode of souls in the planets:—

"They show themselves here," says his guide to the poet, "not because it is their allotted sphere, but to give a sign that they have mounted less high in the degrees of celestial life. One must speak thus to your wit, since it is only from an object of sense that it apprehends what it afterwards makes fit matter for the understanding. Hence Scripture condescends to your faculty, and attributes to God feet and hands, while it understands thereby something different; and Holy Church represents to you in the likeness of men Gabriel and Michael and that other who made Tobias whole again."[1]

2. From the method of abstraction, illustrated in these lines, springs naturally that multitude of allegorical

[1] *Paradiso*, iv. 37-48.

personages which fills the poetry of the Middle Ages: Righteousness and Peace; Lady Mede and Conscience; the Seven Deadly Sins; the Cardinal and Theological Virtues; and most prominently of all, Love, whether in the semi-religious form he assumes in the *Vita Nuova*, or with the semi-pagan attributes assigned to him in the *Romance of the Rose.*

3. As the mental habit of interpreting nature allegorically encouraged the use of the figure of impersonation, so the latter led the way to a new mode of composition, in which abstract characters were presented together in a regular form of action, epic or dramatic. The *Romance of the Rose*, *Le Château d'Amour*, the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, *Le Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*, Mysteries and Moralities without number, indicate the tenacious hold which this form of poetry took upon the mediæval imagination. So strongly indeed did it root itself in the thought of those ages that, even in the sixteenth century, when the genuine fountains of allegorical imagination had run dry, the surviving traditions of criticism still required the application of the principle to poems which owed their existence to quite other motives. In his correspondence with the Cardinal Scipio Gonzaga, Tasso not only feigns that his *Jerusalem Delivered* contains a hidden meaning, but expresses his astonishment that Aristotle should have made no mention of allegory as a distinct form of poetry.[1] Had the poet lived in an age which could have enabled him to observe the changes of art and taste in historical perspective, he must have seen that the growth of allegorical composition was the result of a long series of causes, which had scarcely begun to operate on the human imagination when Aristotle wrote his treatise on poetry.

The first definite mention of allegory in Greek literature occurs in Plato's *Phædrus*, where Socrates, having made a passing reference to the rationalistic explanations, offered in his time, of the myth of Boreas and Orithyia, proceeds to say:—

"Now I quite acknowledge that these explanations are

[1] Letter of 15th June 1575.

'Cast forth the handmaiden and her son.'"[1] The Scriptural account of the Fall is thus explained: "Eve is concupiscence connected with the heart of Adam, that is, the mind of man considered as balanced between good and evil. The serpent is sensual pleasure, by means of which concupiscence leads the mind of man to indulgence in gratifications unworthy of his spirit; and in this consists the fall and its consequences, the birth of Cain—that is, of proud, sinful, and foolish opinion among men."[2]

The Platonic spirit of allegory also took possession of the critics of Greek poetry; and the allegorical interpretation of the Jewish Scripture finds a parallel in the method applied by Porphyry (A.D. 233), one of Philo's intellectual descendants, to the poems of Homer. The moralisation of the Greek poet's polytheism produced results not less grotesque than the theological explanations appended to the popular mediæval tales collected in the *Gesta Romanorum*. Among other interpretations, the Grotto of the Nymphs, in the thirteenth book of the *Odyssey*, was explained as an allegory of the world, the water nymphs themselves being human souls, waiting in their cave till the time came for their union with the bodies which they were predestined to inhabit.[3]

Jew and Greek having thus accepted allegory as the key of their respective religious traditions, it only remained to carry the process one stage farther; and this was done when Origen (A.D. 185), himself the pupil of the Neo-Platonist Ammonius, applied the system of his master's philosophy to illustrate the dogmas of the Christian faith. No man employed more perseveringly than Origen the principle of allegorical interpretation. He taught that as man consists of body, soul, and spirit, so too does the Holy Scripture, which has been granted by divine benevolence for the salvation of man. The simple may be edified by the body (σῶμα); the more advanced by the soul (ψυχή); and the perfect by the spirit (πνεῦμα). Corresponding with this triple division there was a threefold sense in the

[1] Donaldson, *Literature of Ancient Greece*, ii. 175.
[2] *Ibid.* ii. 176.
[3] *Ibid.* ii. 201.

Bible: the carnal or purely historical; the psychical or moral; the spiritual or speculative.[1] This method of interpretation, adopted by the Church, was applied by Gregory the Great in his Commentary on the Book of Job, and as the writings of that illustrious Pope formed part of the standard literature of mediæval education, the use of allegory gradually produced a kind of intellectual atmosphere, necessary to the life of the Middle Ages, and the parent source of such works as the *Vita Nuova* and the *Divine Comedy*.

The influence of Plato's philosophy was equally potent in multiplying the rhetorical figure of Personification, which furnishes the "machinery" for allegorical poetry. Inevitably, though perhaps unconsciously, Plato himself yielded to the inclination to personify his Ideas. The first to explore the vast and unknown world of Abstraction, he took delight in providing his disciples with chart and compass to follow him in his difficult navigation. By degrees Magian elements crept into his system, and the first cause of the universe was connected with the world of sense by means of a graduated scale of spiritual agencies. This tendency in the Platonic philosophy was greatly promoted by the genius of the Romans for abstraction; and when the Greek encyclopædic system of education was established through the breadth of the Roman Empire, the Latin language had become a suitable instrument for the propagation of the allegorical style.[2]

Prominent among the abstract persons of Latin poetry was the figure of Love, Amor, or Cupido. The comparatively insignificant son of Aphrodite seems to have gradually absorbed the attributes of the great primal Eros of the Hesiodic theogony.[3] His divine supremacy, how-

[1] Donaldson, *Literature of Ancient Greece*, ii. 326-7.

[2] For examples of the Latin love of Abstraction, take the great group of allegorical personages whom Virgil (*Æn.* vi. 273) places at the entrance of hell, and such a stanza as this of Horace (*Odes*, i. 24. 5).—

Ergo Quintilium perpetuus Sopor
Urget! cui Pudor et Justitiæ Soror,
Incorrupta Fides, nudaque Veritas
Quando ullum inveniet parem?

[3] Compare Sophocles, *Antigone*, 781; Aristophanes, *Aves*, 606, Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulide*, 548.

ever, was only established after Plato had discovered the analogy between physical passion and intellectual aspiration, and had made use of Eros as a symbol of the dialectical process, by which the mind, in its pursuit of the highest forms of beauty, mounts from the perceptions of sense to the conception of universal ideas. Love became at once the lord of the world of Abstraction, and the pilot of the mind in its voyage through the great ocean which lay between it and the First Cause of its being. In time the Neo-Platonic system was blended with Christian theology; the map of the Spiritual Ocean was gradually defined; and the vague outlines of the old Ideas were filled in with the Celestial Hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite. Succeeding ages made constant use of the new knowledge, and when St. Bonaventura wrote his *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum*, the stages of the journey had been so accurately determined, that Dante was able, in the next generation, to report to the world his own experiences of the region, by the aid of poetical images and the light of scholastic science.

In spite of this systematic development, the ancient world was remarkably slow in adapting allegory to the art of poetry. Pagan moralist and Christian theologian probably both felt that the intellectual instrument for interpreting the highest truth ought not to be too readily adapted to the purposes of amusement; so that, with the exception of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, all the principal allegorical compositions of the old world are written in prose, and are the work of philosophers. The two great examples of allegorical fiction, which may be said to close the period commencing with Plato's myths, are *Amor and Psyche* in the Tales of Apuleius, and the *Marriage of Mercury with Philology* by Martianus Capella. To these may be added a composition of another kind, Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, which is only of the nature of fiction, in so far as the conduct of the narrative depends on the introduction of the allegorical figure of Philosophy.

It is a significant fact that (if we except the *Poem on Boethius*) the first appearance of allegory in mediæval

poetry, composed in the vulgar tongue, is plainly quite independent, in its motive, either of the *Psychomachia*, or of any of the existing models of the style in prose. The whole treatment of the subject of Love by the troubadours is allegorical; moreover, in their poetry the person of Love himself is sometimes described by his symbolical attributes after the manner illustrated in the following passage:—

> So fine his form 'tis hid from mortal sight,
> So swift his foot that flight is all in vain;
> His dart of steel inflicts a bitter pain,
> A cureless wound, yet mingled with delight;
> [illegible]

In this imagery, and in the refined analysis of love in the Provençal lyrics, there appears a close analogy to the description of the characteristics of physical love in the *Symposium*. Was the resemblance merely accidental? It is, I think, hardly possible to conceive that poets of Teutonic descent would have invented their conceited and metaphysical style without some literary model; and it is certain that no model of the kind was offered in the Latin poetry, Christian or pagan, of the decadence. On the whole it seems to me most probable that the connecting channel of thought is to be found in the poetry of Ovid, who naturalised in Latin many of the metaphysical conceits of Alexandrian literature; and that Ovid's vein of amorous sentiment was refined and idealised into a new style by the invention of the troubadours, who were also influenced by the love poetry of the Arabs.[2]

[1] Translated from Raynouard, *Choix des Troubadours*, vol. iii. p. 391:—

> Tant es sotill c'om no la por verar,
> E cor tan tost que res no ill pot fugir,
> E fier tant fort c'om ges non pot guerir
> Ab dart d'assier don fai colp da plazar,
> E no ill ten pro ausberce forbe ni espes,
> Si lansa dreit, e pueis trag demanes
> Sagetas d'aur al son arc asteiat,
> Pueis lansa un dart de plom gent aflat.

[2] I have traced the imagery of Love's gold and lead darts as far back as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, i. 468. With the addition of the steel dart

At the same time, it must be remembered that the vein of Platonic sentiment in the lyrics of the troubadours would never have been so dominant, if it had been derived from a merely literary source, and had not been rather encouraged and developed by certain social conditions, bearing an obvious, though accidental, affinity to points in the Platonic system of philosophy. These conditions were provided by the atmosphere of feudalism and chivalry. In the first place, there was a striking analogy between the Teutonic reverence for women and the Greek worship of physical beauty, on which Plato based his system of dialectic. In the second place, the worship of the Virgin afforded a channel into which this instinct of the German race poured all its tide of devotional feeling; and the mind of many a Christian votary mounted towards heaven precisely in the same manner as Plato's disciples learned to ascend from the admiration of beautiful objects of sense to the contemplation of the heavenly beauty. In the third place, the separation of the feudal aristocracy in Court and Castle favoured, as we have already seen, the formation of a code of conduct and language peculiar to a caste, and not unlike that esoteric form of doctrine which Plato is supposed to have communicated to his more advanced disciples. The book of André le Chapelain on Love corresponds, in its own way, with those mysterious

this imagery is constantly repeated in allegorical poetry through the Middle Ages, and symbolises gladness, sadness, and death. The author of the *Court of Love* speaks of the two darts described by Ovid—

> The Golden Love and Leden Love they hight:
> The tone was sad, the tother glad and light.

And Barnfield, in his *Tears of an Affectionate Shepherd*, alludes to Death's black shaft of steel, and Love's yellow one of gold. Dr. W. G. Rutherford points out to me that the germ of the idea appears in Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulide*, 549—

> δίδυμ' Ἔρως ὁ χρυσοκόμας
> τόξ' ἐντείνεται χαρίτων,
> τὸ μὲν ἐπ' εὐαίωνι πότμῳ,
> τὸ δ' ἐπὶ συγχύσει βιοτᾶς.

The double set of bow and arrows and their twofold effect having been once imagined, some Alexandrian poet may have developed the image of the golden and leaden arrows, which was afterwards still further expanded in the Middle Ages. See further as to the character of Love himself, p. 353, note 1.

revelations on the same subject, which Socrates in the *Symposium* declares that he received from Diotima.[1]

While this vein of mystical sentiment prevailed in the Castle, the old methods of Scriptural interpretation were steadily pursued in the Schools; so that from the eleventh century onwards a vast quantity of allegorical thought was available for poetical purposes. Under such circumstances numerous forms of allegorical composition sprang into existence, but, as the different varieties grouped themselves round two main motives, one chivalrous and the other scholastic, they can be easily classified, and in such a manner as to illustrate the opposite intellectual influences that modified thought under the Feudal and Ecclesiastical Systems in England up to the time of the Reformation. I shall endeavour in this chapter to give some account of the chief English allegorical poems comprehended in these two groups, pointing out their special characteristics, and the different external movements that affected the literary style.

Two of the earliest allegorical poems composed in England belong to the monastic or scholastic group, and are evidently the product of the Saxon element in the national imagination. Of one of these I have already spoken at length. The view of man and nature which characterises the *Vision of Piers the Plowman* is based on the traditional teaching preserved unchanged for generations in the Christian schools. But the manner in which the doctrine is conceived and applied is Langland's own. The energy of individual conviction which animates his satire gives his poem a unique place in the somewhat lifeless history of English allegory, and inspires his abstract personages with a dramatic and human interest of which there is no other example till we meet with the characters of the *Pilgrim's Progress*

Very different is the character of *The Pearl*, a poem that may have been written a little earlier or a little later in the fourteenth century than the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*. The author, whoever he was, was of the

[1] Plato, *Symposium*, 201.

school of poets who sought to combine the surviving traditions of Saxon minstrelsy with the new fashions of French verse. He employs the West Midland or Mercian dialect, and composes in stanzas of twelve lines of four accents, the lines being connected by a recurrence of two alternate rhymes up to the eighth verse, and being also alliterative. The last four verses of each stanza introduce a fresh series of rhymes, and the stanzas are closed by a species of refrain or burden after the manner of the French ballad. In this respect the poem shows the influence of Norman models; but the spirit that it breathes is that of the Saxon monastery, and the half-forgotten literary tradition of Saxon poetry. A praiseworthy enthusiasm for ancient relics of the language has perhaps exaggerated the poetical merits of *The Pearl*.[1] The motives of the composition appear to me to be mainly conventional. Nothing can be more simple than the story. The poet tells us that he lost in an arbour a pearl of exceeding price: he fell asleep and was transported into the celestial regions, where he beheld a fair maiden sitting adorned with pearls, whom he recognised as the jewel he had lost. She showed him the city of the heavenly Jerusalem, and then passed away from him over a river, which having vainly attempted to cross, he afterwards found himself banished from Paradise. Many of the ideas thus expressed—the dream, the *Itinerarium Mentis*, the apocalyptic vision—are the common heirlooms of Platonic allegory; others, such as the introduction of homilies and the rendering of Biblical passages into poetic diction, recall the literary methods of Cynewulf in every point except the phraseology of the minstrel.

It is of course possible that *The Pearl* may embody the feelings of one who had suffered an actual bereavement; but, if so, the poet either wished to leave no trace of himself in his allegory, or, what is more probable, did not know how to reach the heart by those exquisite personal touches that lend such pathos to the parallel situation in

[1] See the edition published by Mr. Israel Gollancz, 1891, Introductory Remarks.

Dante's *Vita Nuova*. Nor does the allegory itself appear to be very happily conceived: no great powers of invention are required to feign that one has lost a pearl, and afterwards to indicate that what has been really lost is a daughter or a sister. Like all the compositions of the school of Cynewulf the poem shows a passion for riddles and conceits. Its chief merits are a very charming style of ideal landscape-painting and a facility of versification, but in the latter respect the writer seems to have had no suspicion of the latent harmonies afterwards evoked from the language by Chaucer; while his archaic methods of metrical diction must exclude him from the list of those who can in any intelligible sense be styled *English* poets.

The Pearl and the *Vision of Piers the Plowman* exemplify the two opposite modes in which the monastic form of allegory can be used as an instrument of religious thought. In the former, allegory is made the vehicle of contemplation; the soul mounts in the Platonic fashion, by means of a vague symbolism, into the ideal world, where it moves in ecstasy through a supernatural atmosphere, in which spiritual things are dimly expressed under figure of sensible objects. Abstract personages are entirely absent in this poem just as in the vision of Dante. They abound, on the contrary, in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, where the poet's aim is to contrast the high ideal of Christian practice, as set forth by the Church, with the vices of the actual world. But, in obedience to the didactic instinct of the satirist, Langland's personages almost completely divest themselves of their abstract character; and Gluttony or Avarice appears before us as the living portrait of the toper or the miser, as he might have been met with at any time in the London streets Both allegories express religious tendencies in the Saxon mind; in the one case, the mysticism that prompts it to take refuge in the cloister; in the other, the active conscience that bids it preach to the people.

The chivalrous form of allegory, which clearly derives its origin from the Norman element in the nation, lies between these two extreme points, and reflects the manners,

thoughts, and sentiments of the ruling classes of society under the Feudal System. Introduced by Chaucer from the Continent, it was developed by Lydgate and carried by James I., after his release from captivity, into Scotland, where it helped to form a new school of allegory represented by Dunbar and Gavin Douglas; it survived, in the scholastic form developed by Hawes, and in the debased style of Skelton, up to the very eve of the Reformation. It furnishes, therefore, a mirror of social thought and manners during a very considerable period in the history of England. Based as it was, however, on a kind of Freemasonry, in a society of which the framework has long since disappeared, it is exceedingly difficult for the modern reader, without a strong effort of imagination, to realise its spirit and meaning. I propose, accordingly, before considering the merits of some of the characteristic poems of the class, to examine that fundamental view of Nature which, in the Middle Ages, was indicated by the name of Love.

We are, in the first place, to imagine a great world of abstraction, inhabited by all the invisible forces and principles which influence human life, and which are always coming into contact with each other in personified forms after the manner of men and women.[1] The system of this invisible world is bound together by the chain of Love, which therefore, in one sense, is to be regarded as the principle of life.[2] Love, however, is not only a spiritual principle, but a person, the sovereign, together with his mother Venus, of the unseen world and of the abstract beings

[1] In illustration of this point the reader may consult the opening of the *Parlement of Foules* with the description of Scipio's Dream, and especially the first stanza—

> The lyfe so short, the craft so long to lerne,
> Th' assay so hard, so sharp the conquering,
> The dredful joy always that flit so yerne,
> All this mean I by Love, etc.

[2] This idea is borrowed from Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, and is expressed by Chaucer in the "Knight's Tale" (2987-93):—

> The firste mover of the cause above,
> Whan he firste made the fayre chaine of love,
> Gret was th' effect and high was his entente,
> Wel wist he why and what thereof he ment,
> For with that fayre chaine of love he bond
> The fire, the air, the water, and the lond,
> In certain bondis that they may not flee.

in sympathy with either the one or the other. His native genius, aided by fine taste and judgment, had enabled him to form a conception of nature and society extending far beyond the range of the conventional creed, and contrasting strongly with the flimsy metaphysics of Provençal poetry. Hence there is an element of humour in his treatment of the subject of allegorical Love. He represents himself as an offender against the law of the god. He had translated in his youth both parts of the *Romance of the Rose*, and by so doing had placed himself in the position of an heresiarch. Still more grievous offence must have been given to the orthodox guardians of chivalrous manners by the representation of Love in *Troilus and Criseyde*. For here he had not only shown disrespect to the statutes in the character of Pandarus, who is evidently introduced as an exponent of the satirical rules laid down by John de Meung for the guidance of lovers; but he had defied all the established "precedents" by describing a woman unfaithful in love. Male, and still more female, itics would not have been slow to censure him for these -ages: hence, in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good*

and in this department of their theme the chivalrous school of allegory lighted upon an inexhaustible mine of symbolism. They found that Love resembled a process at law, and more particularly the practice of the *Cours d'Amour*, as actually constituted. Neither Venus nor her son could have been better versed in the metaphysics of the law of Love than the Countess of Champagne and the other presidents of those tribunals; nor would it have been possible for masculine poets to compete with the female lawyers and schoolmen in the profound analysis applied to each case brought before the courts.[1] But the institutions themselves provided the troubadours with a store of images and sentiments, ready prepared for allegorical composition. Love became the president of a court; the court required to be regulated by statutes; and the statutes had to be interpreted by reference to all that Ovid and other poetical authorities had said upon the point raised. All the precedents bearing on the subject were carefully collected from Greek mythology and formally cited; the lovers came before the court or parliament, bringing with them "bills," "complaints," or "petitions"; the parties to the suit must be admonished and instructed by the judge; and, lastly, offenders against the statutes were ordered to make atonement for their transgressions. In one or other of these various aspects of Love is presented every example in French or English poetry of the chivalrous allegory which derives its origin from the *Romance of the Rose*.

It has been already said that Chaucer was the first of our poets to naturalise the chivalrous allegory in England. But his position in the history of the style is very peculiar. Bred up in the court of Edward III., the mirror of European chivalry, he was of course familiar with each form and punctilio which determined the standard of feudal manners, and with every rule of the art of poetry in which these manners were reflected. But he was far from being

[1] Sir Walter Scott mentions a curious case in his Notes to *Anne of Geierstein*, in which the court had to decide which of three lovers had been most highly honoured by a lady, who had conversed with one, while she pressed the hand of another, and touched the foot of a third!

in sympathy with either the one or the other. His native genius, aided by fine taste and judgment, had enabled him to form a conception of nature and society extending far beyond the range of the conventional creed, and contrasting strongly with the flimsy metaphysics of Provençal poetry. Hence there is an element of humour in his treatment of the subject of allegorical Love. He represents himself as an offender against the law of the god. He had translated in his youth both parts of the *Romance of the Rose*, and by so doing had placed himself in the position of an heresiarch. Still more grievous offence must have been given to the orthodox guardians of chivalrous manners by the representation of Love in *Troilus and Criseyde*. For here he had not only shown disrespect to the statutes in the character of Pandarus, who is evidently introduced as an exponent of the satirical rules laid down by John de Meung for the guidance of lovers; but he had defied all the established "precedents" by describing a woman unfaithful in love. Male, and still more female, critics would not have been slow to censure him for these outrages: hence, in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, he humorously conceives of himself as put upon his trial by the god of Love, making recantation of his heresies, and doing penance for his past sins by the composition of the *Legend* itself. Chaucer had no wish to bring the institutions of knighthood into contempt: nothing can be more respectful or honourable than his pictures of the Knight and the Squire in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales:* but he was the first great painter in modern European literature of real life, and in this capacity he ridiculed—as Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Molière did after him—the extravagant affectations which had grown out of the mere fashion of chivalry. Even in his allegorical compositions we feel that he is the first-born child of the Renaissance.

In this respect Chaucer stands alone among the allegorists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The one Englishman of supreme poetical genius whom the reign of Richard II. produced, his work shows him always

instinctively conscious of the spiritual forces which were beginning to revive the civic standard of life and art. The chivalrous allegories of his immediate followers, on the other hand, have a certain interest of their own, because, reflecting exclusively the conventional manners of the time, they enable the modern reader to reconstruct in his own imagination the ideal of a vanished society. In *The Temple of Glass* by Lydgate, *The King's Quair* by James I. of Scotland, and *The Court of Love*, the highly ingenious work of an unknown English author at the close of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century, we see, as in the lyrics of the troubadours, in the treatise of André le Chapelain, and in the allegory of Guillaume de Lorris, a reflection of the sentiments of court and castle, without any mixture of satire or double intention.

The Temple of Glass is a composition conforming at every point to the strict rules governing the fashionable Love-allegory. It takes, of course, the form of a vision, to which the poet is careful, in the orthodox style, to assign a date.[1] Tossing in his bed at night, like all true lovers since the time of Ovid,[2] he is at last oppressed by a deep sleep, in which he dreams that he is carried into the wilderness, where, built on a craggy rock, he finds a Temple of Glass. Into this he enters through one of those "wickets" which usually give allegorical dreamers access to the scene of action,[3] and observes that the walls of the temple are decorated with paintings of such "precedents"

[1] Whan that Lucina with hir pale light
Was joyned last with Phebus in aquarie
Amyd Decembre, when of Januarie
Ther be kalendes of the newe yere,

i.e. when the sun and moon were last in conjunction in the middle of December.

[2] Within my bed for soe I gan me shroude,
Al desolate for constreint of my wo,
The longe nyght waloing to and fro.

Compare Ovid, *Amores*, i. 2. 1-4:

Esse quid hoc dicam quod tam mihi dura videntur
Strata, neque in lecto pallia nostra sedent;
Et vacuus somno noctem, quam longa, peregi,
Lassaque versati corporis ossa dolent.

[3] Compare Chaucer's *House of Fame*, 477; *Romance of Rose*, 528-530; *Parlement of Foules*, 119.

of love as are generally employed to decorate the ideal architecture.[1] The temple is filled with lovers who have come thither to "complain" to the goddess, since "the course of true love never does run smooth"; and the poet makes full use of his opportunity to analyse and classify the difficulties, dangers, and misfortunes which spring out of the universal passion. Among these lovers his attention is specially directed to a lady of unequalled beauty, doubtless intended to represent one of the persons whom he means to compliment, just as the old painters introduce into their altar-pieces kneeling portraits of the donors. Like the other votaries, she is making her "complaint" to the goddess, and this is distinguished from the narrative part of the poem—which is written in rhyming couplets of ten syllables—by being embodied in the "royal" or seven-line stanza. The lady complains that she is in love, but is not at liberty to make known her preference. Venus makes a very gracious answer, in the same metre, to the suppliant, and promises her that the satisfaction of her love will be all the sweeter on account of her previous suffering. When the lady has returned devout thanks to the goddess, the latter enjoins her to be faithful to her lover, and throws into her lap boughs of hawthorn, the emblem of constancy. After this a knight appears soliloquising, and very soon makes it plain that he is a most admirable subject of love. What thing is this, he asks, that has happened to him, that he who was once so free is now bound in Cupid's chain? He has seen an angelic creature in the temple; her eyes have wounded him to death; to fight against her is of no avail; he yields himself prisoner. But what will be the end of his torment? Meekness alone can serve him. Let the Lady Venus teach him what is best to do, hanging in the balance between hope and dread. Then he enters into the oratory, and breaks into a very long prayer in the royal stanza, which sets forth how his lady possesses every excellence except the virtue of pity. Nevertheless, whatever his lady's decision may be, he will submit

[1] *House of Fame*, 128-139.

himself humbly to it, and will be as constant to her as Antony to Cleopatra, as Pyramus to Thisbe, as Achilles to Polyxena, as Hercules to Deianira. But let Venus kindle his lady's heart through her son Cupid!

To the supplication of one who has so fully satisfied all the conditions of true love, only one answer is possible; and nothing remains but for the *dea ex machinâ* to bring the divided parties together. This she does in a speech which, considering all the confidences the lady has entrusted to the goddess and the reader, reflects the highest credit upon the former's sense of what is due to her own sex. For in the first place she informs the lady, with an air of severity, as if she had never seen her before, and as if she were only dealing with the claims of the male lover, that she must not carry her resistance too far, else she herself will have to "record cruelty" against her. "Banish danger," she says, "out of your heart, and let in mercy." She then proceeds to give the knight a long lecture on his duties to the lady and to all womankind, but she leaves the other party to the suit entirely free to follow her own discretion. Thereupon all the votaries in the temple unite their voices in a ballad in praise of Venus, and this wakes the poet, who is full of woe at losing sight of so beautiful a lady, and resolves to write a little treatise with "a process" in praise of women.

The Temple of Glass concludes with an "Envoy" in which the poet despatches his "litel boke" to his mistress; and from this it may be reasonably conjectured that the allegory was written by the Monk of Bury, at the request of some knight or courtier who wished to pay a compliment to a lady. *The Court of Love*, on the contrary, begins with an announcement of the author's intention to write, for the amusement of his lady, a "litel short treatesse":—

That is entitled thus, The Court of Love.
And ye that ben metriciens me excuse,
I you beseech, for Venus' sake above,
For what I mean in this ye need not muse:
And if so be my lady it refuse
For lacke of ornate speech, I would be wo,
That I presume to her to writen so.

But my entente and all my busie cure
Is for to write this treatesse as I can
Unto my lady stable, true, and sure,
Faithfull and kind sith first that she began
Me to accept in service as her man;
To her be all the pleasure of this book,
That when her like she may it rede and look.

The reader will easily perceive from this specimen of the versification that *The Court of Love* must be a composition considerably later in date than *The Temple of Glass*.[1] A complete master of his metrical instrument, the author is also far superior to Lydgate in fancy and invention: he knows how to construct a poetical action, and how to make a proper use of the machinery of personification. He is, however, working on precisely the same conventional theme; and the peculiarly interesting feature in his poem is, that the advance in literary and allegorical skill is accompanied by a distinct decline in the delicacy of chivalrous manners.

Philogenet, a clerk of Cambridge, at the age of eighteen years, is driven by Love to seek his court on Mount Citheron. After many inquiries he finds the place, and comes to a fair castle, the chatelaine of which is the queen Alcestis, who lives in it with her husband Admetus. There he espies a friend of his called Philobone, a gentlewoman, "chamberere to the quene," who reproaches him (quite in the spirit of André le Chapelain)[2] for not having come to court before, and tells him that he must look for the displeasure of Love. Her anticipations are soon verified: Love sends for the stranger, and asks him sternly why he is so late in coming; to which Philogenet replies that he has been kept away by shamefastness After this avowal the god pardons him, and he is allowed to read the twenty statutes that have to be observed in Love's Court. These are cited at length: they are all derived from the old authoritative sources, but contain here and there some very broad allusions, which would

[1] For a very favourable specimen of the versification of the latter, see p. 332.

[2] Andreæ Capellani, *De Amore*, lib. i. cap. 5:—"Ante decimum quartum annum masculus non solet in amoris exercitu militare."

not have been tolerated when chivalry was at its zenith. When Philogenet has perused them, he turns to the book of female statutes, but is sternly interrupted by Rigour, master of the ceremonies, who tells him that no one of the male sex may look into this volume, and despatches him to the temple of Venus, where he finds "a thousand million" lovers praising the goddess. Philogenet, though he is well disposed for love, is not in love with any particular person, and all he can do is to meditate, like Crashaw, on

> That not impossible She,
> Who shall command my heart and me.

His friend Philobone, however, lets him into some of the secrets of the place. From her information we gather that a considerable change has come over the manners of the court. Philogenet is puzzled with a tomb which he sees in the temple—

> So whan I met with Philobone in hie,
> I gan demand whose is this sepulture:
> "Forsooth" (quod she) "a tender creature
>
> "Is shrined here, and Pity is her name.
> She saw an egle wreke him on a flie,
> And pluck his wing and eke him in his game,
> And tender herte of him that made her die:
> Eke she would weep and mourn right pitously,
> To seene a lover suffer great distresse;
> In all the court n'as none, as I do gesse,
>
> "That coud a lover half so well availe,
> Ne of his wo the torment or the rage
> Asken, for he was sure withouten faile,
> That of his grief she coud the heat assuage.
> In steed of Pity speedeth hote corage
> The matters all of court, now she is dead,
> I me refert in this to womanhead.
>
> "For weil, and weep, and cry, and speak, and pray,
> Women would not have pity on thy plaint,
> Ne by that mean to ease thine herte convay,
> But thee receiven for their own talent;
> And say that Pity causeth thee in consent
> Of reuth to take thy service and thy paine
> In that thou maist, to please thy soveraine."

In all this there appears to be a reference to the coarser vein that impaired the manners of chivalry about the reign of Edward IV. Philobone, however, tells her friend of a certain Rosiall, to whom she introduces him, and in whom he at once sees the embodiment of his ideal. To her accordingly he proceeds to make fervent love in the most approved scholastic fashion; but Rosiall is much too faithful a disciple of André le Chapelain to sanction these headlong proceedings:—

"Nay God forbede to feffe you so with grace,
And for a word of sugred eloquence
To have compassion in so little space,
Than were it time that some of us were hence.
Ye shall not find in me such insolence." [1]

There is nothing for it but for Philogenet to prove by his behaviour under these trying circumstances that he is a lover of the genuine kind. He first of all makes a long and piteous appeal to his lady for mercy:—

"With that I fell in sound and dede as stone,
With colour slaine and wanne as asshe pale,
And by the hand she caught me up anon,
"Arise" (quod she) "what? have ye dronken dwale?
Why slepen ye? it is no nightertale".
"Now mercy, sweete" (quod I) "ywis (I was?) affraied."
"What thing" (quod she) "hath made you so dismaied?

"Now wote I well that ye a lover be,
Your hew is witnesse in this thing," she said.
"If ye were secret, ye might know" (quod she)
"Curteis and kind all this should be allaid,
And now, mine herte, all that I have missaid
I shall amend and set your heart at ease."
"That word it is" (quod I) "that doth me please." [2]

Comparing this with the very elaborate precautions that Venus takes in *The Temple of Glass* to preserve the lady's dignity when she begins to favour her lover, we see that the code of manners must, during the fifteenth century, have been considerably relaxed. Philogenet, however, is not privileged at once to enjoy his mistress's

[1] Compare extract from André le Chapelain on pp. 173 74.
[2] See Rules 20, 3, and 15 in the *Statutes of Love* cited on pp. 174 75.

not have been tolerated when chivalry was at its zenith. When Philogenet has perused them, he turns to the book of female statutes, but is sternly interrupted by Rigour, master of the ceremonies, who tells him that no one of the male sex may look into this volume, and despatches him to the temple of Venus, where he finds "a thousand million" lovers praising the goddess. Philogenet, though he is well disposed for love, is not in love with any particular person, and all he can do is to meditate, like Crashaw, on

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[1] Compare extract from André le Chapelain [illegible]
[2] See Rules 20, 3, and 15 in the [illegible]

society; he must first be taken by Philobone to see all the mysteries of the court, and be introduced to the usual abstractions, Envy, Despair, Hope, Flattery, Privy Thought, and others, who have been residents in the place since the days of the *Romance of the Rose*. When he has been duly initiated Rosiall returns to him:—

"Yes, draw your herte with all your force and might
To lustinesse, and ben as ye have said,
And think that I no drop of favour hight,
Ne never had unto your desire obeid,
Till sodenly me thought me was affraied
To sene you waxe so dede of Countenaunce,
And Pite bade me done you some pleasaunce.

"Out of her shrine she rose from deth to live,
And in mine eare full privily she spake,
'Doth not your servaunt hens away to drive,
Rosiall' (quod she) and than mine herte it brake,
For tenderiche: and where I found moch lacke
In your person, than I myself bethought,
And saide, this is the man mine herte hath sought."

Philogenet, duly grateful, replies with vows of constant service and fidelity, and the poem is concluded by a kind of religious service, in which different birds sing hymns in praise of love.

Midway in point of sentiment between *The Temple of Glass* and *The Court of Love* stands *The Kingis Quair* (the King's Book), an allegorical poem written by James I. of Scotland in 1423. The peculiarity of this composition is that in it the author makes the conventional machinery of the allegorical style the vehicle of his own personal experience: hence the stanza he uses has received the name of "royal." The delicacy, the knightly feeling, the strict attention to prescribed forms of etiquette, which characterise Lydgate's work, are here united with something of the inventive skill shown by the writer of the *Court of Love*; and parts at least of the composition are animated by a genuine lyric spirit, which, considered together with the romantic history of James, gives the *Kingis Quair* a unique place among the allegories of the chivalrous school.

James I., the second son of King Robert III. of Scotland, was born in 1391. After the murder of his elder brother the Duke of Rothesay (related in *The Fair Maid of Perth*) his father in 1405 sent him for safety to France. During the voyage the ship in which he was sailing was captured by an English vessel, and James, being taken to Henry IV. of England, was kept prisoner at Windsor for eighteen years. In the last year of his captivity he saw from his window Joan Beaufort, daughter of the Earl of Somerset, walking in the garden, and falling in love with her at first sight, composed in her honour *The Kingis Quair*. The lady returned his love, and, their attachment being approved on political grounds, they were married in 1424. A ransom was accepted on behalf of James, and he returned to Scotland, and was crowned king on the 21st of May in the same year. His later history, with its tragic close, when, after a reign of thirteen years, he was, in spite of the heroic devotion of Catherine Douglas, murdered in the presence of his wife, forms a striking episode of Scottish history.[1]

The design of *The Kingis Quair*, in spite of a little confusion in the order of the narrative, is remarkably happy.[2] In imitation of his master, Chaucer, with whose works he had become familiar during his captivity,[3] the king describes himself as having read Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ* during a sleepless night. Deeply

[1] Speaking in the usual allegorical vein of Joan's return of his love the king says:

> And thus this floure, I can seye you no more,
> So hertly has unto my herte attendit,
> That from the deth her man sche has defendit.

It is a remarkable coincidence that the queen afterwards sought to save her husband from actual assassination by throwing herself between him and his murderers.

[2] All readers should study Professor Skeat's admirable edition of the poem (published for the Scottish Text Society). I cannot, however, subscribe to his view that the king began his work without any distinct idea

impressed with the reflections of his author, he thinks how applicable they are to his own case, and, when the bells ring for matins, they seem to him to be bidding him tell the story of his fortunes. He accordingly makes a +, and begins his tale with the melancholy recital of his capture, and of the long sorrows he endured up to the eighteenth year of his imprisonment, and that happy day when he went to his window—

> And therewith kest I doun myn eye ageyne,
> Quhare as I sawe, walking under the toure,
> Full secretly new cummyn hir to pleyne,
> The fairest or the freschest yonge floure
> That ever I sawe, me thoght, before that houre,
> For quhyele sodayn abate, anon astert
> The blude of all my body to my hert.

The blessed vision passes out of his sight, and this of course brings him to the very climax of his misfortunes. All the rest of the day he makes his moan like a true lover, but at night, worn out with weeping and lamenting, he falls into a slumber which sets in operation the usual allegorical dream machinery. Parting from his body his spirit makes its way by the orthodox "Itinerary" to the sphere of Venus, where it finds a multitude of lovers, classified in an order much resembling that adopted by Lydgate in *The Temple of Glass*,[1] and where it finally encounters Venus herself, to whom it makes the inevitable "complaint," or, as James prefers on this occasion to call it, "salute." There is, however, a note of novelty in this address, which introduces us to the doctrine of the planetary influences, so prevalent in the Middle Ages:—

> Hye quene of lufe! sterre of benevolence!
> Pitouse princess, and planet merciable!
> Appeser of malice and violence!
> By vertew pure of your aspectis stable,
> Unto your grace lat now ben acceptable
> My pure request, that can no forthir gone
> To seken help, bot unto yow allone.

Venus listens to him favourably, but explains that there are other influences which must determine his fortune,

[1] Compare *King's Quair*, stanzas 82-93, with *Temple of Glass*, 143-246.

and that, in the first place, he must betake himself, under the guidance of Good Hope, to Minerva. Minerva, the goddess of patience, expert in all questions of theology, does not hesitate to quote Ecclesiastes, or to plunge for his edification into the question of Free-Will and Necessity. Though all things are fore-ordained, still, as she explains, the more fore-knowledge a man has, the more he can control his fortune; but as King James is weak in this respect, he must mainly trust to the kindness of Fortune herself; and to that goddess she accordingly despatches him. Fortune shows him the manner in which she works her wheel, upon which she bids him boldly mount, but just as he has done so she takes him, as he says, by the ear "so ernestly that therewithal I woke." Fearful lest all this should prove no more than a dream, yet not without hope, he goes to his window, when a turtle-dove alights on his hand, bearing in her bill a branch of gillyflowers with the inscription:—

> Awake! awake! I bring, lufar, I bring
> The newis glad that blisfull ben and sure
> Of thy comfort; now lauch, and play, and syng,
> That art beside so glad an aventure;
> For in the hevyn decrevit is thy cure.

The bird then spreads her wings and flies away, while the king, delighted with the omen, breaks into an enthusiastic song of gratitude for the chain of events that had led him to his good fortune, and concludes his poem with the following curious stanza:—

> Unto the Impnis[1] of my maisters dere,
> Gowere and Chaucere, that on the steppis satt
> Of rhetorike, quhile thei were lyvand here,
> Superlative as poets laureate,
> In moralitee and eloquence ornate.
> I recommend . . .
> And e . . . . . .
> Amen.

As there are few indications in James's work of Gower's influence, it is probable that the admiration here expressed

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> In moralitee and eloquence ornate,
> I recommend my buk in lynis sevin,
> And eke their saules unto the blisse of hevin. Amen.

As there are few indications in James's work of Gower's influence, it is probable that the admiration here expressed

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for him arose chiefly from the skill he had shown in the metrical use of English. Chaucer, on the other hand, may fairly be called James's "master," and *The Kingis Quair* is full of recollections of the English poet's writings; nevertheless in design and execution it bears the stamp of original genius, and two of its passages—the apostrophe to the nightingale, when Joan appears in the garden, and the concluding outburst of gratitude for the poet's good fortune—deserve to be recorded among the flowers of early English poetry.[1]

The Kingis Quair may be said to form a landmark in the history of allegorical poetry. After the middle of the fifteenth century we observe a rapid ebb in the inspiring forces to which this class of composition originally owed its being. There is no longer a flowing tide of religious contemplation, producing allegories like the *Vita Nuova* and *The Pearl;* nor is the lyrical impulse sustained, which, springing out of the spirit and manners of chivalry, found expression first in the minstrelsy of the troubadours, and afterwards in the long series of fictions derived from the first part of the *Romance of the Rose.* The motive power of original production has sunk with the dwindling life of monasticism and feudalism; but it has left behind it a fully developed literary mould, into which all metrical composers are now inclined to cast their ideas; a habit of finding resemblances between material and spiritual things, and a tendency to make a mere mechanical use of personification as a figure of rhetoric. Henceforth this established method of poetical composition is itself largely modified by various external forces, religious, social, and literary, which have their origin in very different springs of thought.

Of these forces I propose to speak at some length in the next volume when considering the combined general causes that helped to develop the movement usually known as the Renaissance. But in the meantime it will be necessary to summarise them, in order that the reader may understand the reasons for the progressive changes

[1] *The Kingis Quair*, stanzas 54-60, 189-193.

in the form of allegorical poetry. The most powerful factor of change was the removal of the sovereign influence in matters of taste, which had hitherto been diffused through a multitude of monasteries and castles, to a single centre, the Court. All the arts were gradually absorbed into the service of the royal pleasure; consequently allegory, from being a vehicle of devotional feeling, or an esoteric instrument of social freemasonry regulating the intercourse of the sexes, was gradually transformed into a mode of intellectual amusement for the king and his retinue. The natural effect of this change of character was to deprive allegory of the mystical atmosphere with which Platonic tradition had helped to invest it, and thereby to superannuate a considerable part of the time-honoured machinery. After the first half of the fifteenth century, for example, we seldom meet with the spiritual "Itinerary" of which the earlier allegorical poets make so much use. Venus and Cupid lose many of their symbolical attributes: the imagery of the Courts of Love is no longer employed; the Vision with all its ideal landscape occupies a much less prominent place than formerly in the design. As the monastic or chivalric sentiment declines in these compositions, so does the scholastic motive advance: the poet thinks principally of showing his learning: he is careful in the invention of his plot: he has a set moral: yet, while he lets us see on all occasions that he has had the advantage of an encyclopædic education, he does not forget that he must provide for the amusement as well as the instruction of his hearers. Hence he borrows many hints from the dramatic entertainments most in vogue. He imparts to his epic narrative some of the elements of the Morality or the Pageant; and, as the old chivalrous abstractions—Love with his different attendants, Shame, Jealousy, Danger, Wicked-Tongue, and the like—drop out of the action, he supplies their places with a host of mythological personages, the revived offspring of pagan fable.

Such are the characteristics of what may be called the Middle School of Allegory, forming the link between the

chivalrous type of the style introduced by Chaucer from the Continent, and its final literary development in the hands of Spenser. Were we, indeed, dependent upon English examples of this class of composition, we should be unable to trace with exactness the stages of the evolution; for between the death of Lydgate and the appearance of Stephen Hawes—a period of fifty years—the history of English poetry is a complete blank. For this long interval of barrenness the bloody civil wars of the time sufficiently account; *inter arma silent Musæ;* but fortunately the contemporary poetry of Scotland allows us to observe accurately the progress of an art, the course of which in the southern kingdom had been so rudely interrupted. The Scottish poetry of the fifteenth and early part of the sixteenth century is, in spite of minor differences of orthography and grammatical inflection, the direct offspring of the school of Chaucer. Carried north by James I. after his release from captivity, the tradition thus established was continued by Henryson, Dunbar, and Gavin Douglas, to a point from which we can easily resume its history in England. During this epoch the court of the Scottish kings illustrates the forces which were transforming the structure of feudal and ecclesiastical society. For while the surface of Scottish life was always stormy and troubled, the succession to the throne itself was undisputed, and the kingdom, relieved for the time from the fear of invasion by its powerful neighbour, made rapid progress in the Continental arts and refinements which flowed into it from its intercourse with France. The history and poetry of the nation mutually illuminate the surviving monuments of its thoughts and actions.

The earliest representative of this Middle School of Allegory in Scotland is Robert Henryson.[1] Born about 1425, he was admitted a member of Glasgow University, Licentiate in Arts and Bachelor in Decrees in 1462, and afterwards became a schoolmaster in connection with the Benedictine monastery at Dunfermline, in which town he was notary public. He died probably near the end of

[1] An edition of his works by D. Laing was published in 1865.

the century. Among his principal works were *Orpheus and Eurydice*, an adaptation from Boethius, in which the mythological story is more or less allegorised, and fitted with a suitable moral; *The Testament of Cresseid*, a very curious continuation of Chaucer's story, relating how Cressida became a leper, and how her beauty so entirely disappeared that Troilus bestowed an alms upon her without knowing her; *Robene and Makyne*, a pastoral dialogue interesting as containing plainly the metrical germ of the famous ballad of the *Nut-brown Maid.* In all these poems the moral element is very dominant, but it finds its most powerful expression in the *Moral Fables*, a work in which Henryson applies the style of Æsop to the manners of his own day. The following stanzas set forth the poet's purpose :—

> My author in his Fabellis tellis how
> That brutall Beistis spak and understude,
> And to gude purpose dispute and argow,
> Ane syllogisme propone, and eke conclude;
> Putting exemple and similitude;
> How mony men in operatioun
> Are lyke to bestis in conditioun.
>
> Na marevll is ane man be lyke ane beist,
> Quhilk luffis ay carnall and foul delyte,
> That schame can nocht him range, nor arreist,
> But takis all the lust and appetyte,
> And that throw custume and the daylie ryte
> Syne in their myndes so fast is radicate,
> That thay in brutall beistis are transformate

Besides his fondness for classical themes and his tendency to regard all subjects from a moral point of view, Henryson gives signs of the approach of the Renaissance in his *pictorial* treatment of allegory. The descriptions of his abstract personages are highly generalised in the manner of the Latin poets, and at the same time show that attention to the effects of pageantry which is so marked a feature in the poetry of Spenser. The following picture of Summer is a good example of his style :—

The somer with his jolye mantill of grene,
With flouris fair furrit on everilk fent,[1]
Quilk Flora, goddes of the flouris quene,
Hes to that lord as for his seasoun lent,
And Phœbus with his golden bemis gent
Hes purfellit[2] and paynted plesandlie
With heat and moysture stilland from the skie.

The Preiching of the Swallow, v. 57.

The chief place among the Scottish poets who flourished before the Reformation has been assigned to William Dunbar. Specimens of his poems, including *The Golden Targe*, *The Thistle and the Rose*, and *The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*, were published by Lord Hailes in 1770, and, appearing at a time when the current of taste, both in England and Scotland, was setting in the direction of antiquity, were welcomed with a somewhat exaggerated enthusiasm. Warton was generous in his appreciation of Dunbar's merits.[3] Scott, in the next generation, proclaimed him to be the greatest of Scottish poets.[4] Campbell compared him with Chaucer.[5] His poems, collected in 1834 by David Laing, allow us to form a cooler estimate of his genius, and show us that Dunbar, while possessing a rich, vigorous, and versatile imagination, wanted the qualities which entitle a man to the front rank in the history of national poetry. Essentially a poet of the court, his talents were always employed in satisfying the momentary tastes of his patrons, so that though his works are of great importance to the antiquary, he rarely touches those notes of human interest which are the passport to the sympathy of the general reader.[6]

Very little is known of his life. As he took the degree of Master of Arts in St. Andrews University in 1479, he was probably born before 1460. Entering the Order of St. Francis or the Grey Friars, he seems to have passed a considerable portion of his earlier life as a wandering

[1] Opening.
[2] Embroidered.
[3] *History of English Poetry*, sect. xxx.
[4] *Memorials of George Bannatyne*, p. 14.
[5] Campbell's *Specimens of the British Poets*, vol. ii. p. 68.
[6] A careful edition of Dunbar's Works, from the hand of Mr. Æ. J. G. Mackay, has been issued by the Scottish Text Society, 1889.

preacher, making acquaintance not only with England, but with the Continent.[1] In 1491 he was probably a member of the embassy sent to France under the Earl of Bothwell, being employed to make copies and records of the negotiations. As a reward for this and other diplomatic services, and perhaps in recompense for his duties as court poet, he was awarded in 1500 an annual pension of £10, to be paid until he should be promoted to a benefice of the value of more than £40 a year. From this time forwards he poured forth, for the amusement of his patrons, a constant stream of ballads, complimentary verses, satires, burlesques, and humorous addresses to the king, the main purpose of which was to point out the long delay in the arrival of his promised preferment. It does not appear, indeed, that his particular expectation was ever gratified, but in 1507 his pension was increased from £10 to £20, and in 1510 to £80, so that, compared with other dependent members of his profession, his career as a poet may be regarded as a successful one. The date of his death is uncertain, but it probably occurred before 1530.

As a poet he may be described as a jongleur transformed to meet the requirements of a literary age. His poems show a shrewd knowledge of men and manners, and remarkable skill in presenting, under a variety of novel aspects, the somewhat narrow range of themes acceptable to a court. His favourite poetical device was to carry a single burden or refrain through a number of stanzas, each containing a different turn of thought; but he frequently amused the king and queen with personal satires on the courtiers, or with rapid sketches of scenes in actual life, which have all the character of improvisations.

His allegories, like those of Henryson, indicate the influence both of classical studies and court pageants on the

[1] In freiris weid full fairly have I fleichit,
In it haif I in pulpet gone and preichit,
In Derntoun Kirk and eik in Canterberry;
In it I passed at Dover ore the ferry,
Throw Picardy, and thair the peple teechit.
Visitation of St Francis.

older forms of chivalric symbolism. *The Golden Targe* has a plot of some ingenuity. Falling asleep, in the orthodox fashion, one May morning, by the side of a river, the poet beholds in his dream a ship approaching from which a hundred ladies land. This is the Court of Venus, which includes all the heathen goddesses, the chief of whom are duly enumerated; and it is presently joined by the Court of Cupid, equally well attended by the gods of Latin poetry. The two companies combine, and please themselves with music, singing, and dancing. Coming out of his concealment to view the sight, the poet is espied by Venus, who orders her archers to arrest him; whereupon Dame Beauty assails him with a whole troop of feminine Attractions, such as Fair Having, Fine Portraiture, Pleasaunce, and Lusty Cheer. Reason, however, appears in his defence, and protects him from these assailants behind a Golden Targe or Shield, with which Youth, Innocence, Dread, and Obedience are also successfully repulsed; but at last Venus orders Dissimulation to bring up her reserves in aid of Beauty, and the eyes of Reason being blinded with a powder, the poet is taken prisoner. Beguiled by Dissimulation, he continues in the company of Cherishing and New Acquaintance, till Danger at last hands him over to the keeping of Heaviness; at which point Æolus blows a great blast upon his trumpet; the abstractions vanish; and the poet, waking out of his dream, concludes his composition with some stanzas in praise of "reverend Chaucer," "moral Gower," and "Lydgate laureate."

The Thistle and the Rose is a complimentary poem, written to celebrate the marriage between Margaret, daughter of Henry VII. of England, and James IV. of Scotland. Great ingenuity is shown in the conduct of this allegory, which in some parts seems to have been suggested by Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules*. Nature first summons the animals to receive her orders, and gives instructions to the Lion, king of beasts—the emblem of the Scottish nation—for the good government of his realm. She then addresses herself to the flowers,

and, committing sovereignty to the "awful Thistle," bids him cherish above all others the "fresh Rose," which at the same time she crowns, and hails as Queen of Flowers. The poem is concluded with the conventional concert of birds, who praise the Rose, and of course awake the poet.

Beauty and the Prisoner describes, in a succession of stanzas all ending with the word "prisoner," the manner in which the poet was taken captive by Beauty, his lady, and of his various fortunes up to the point where Slander appeared to be master of the field:—

> Than Matrimony, that noble king,
>   Was grievit, and gatherit ane great host,
> And all enermit[1] without leising
>   Chased Sklander to the West Sea coast;
> . . . .
> . . .
> . .
>   Betwix Beauty and her Prisoneir.

This stanza will enable the reader to perceive how far abstraction and impersonation, originally modes of philosophical thought, had been carried as mere ornaments of poetical style.

The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins is an allegory of a different kind, in which the spirit of parody and burlesque predominates. Lord Hailes, Warton, Campbell, and other critics, have regarded this poem as a proof of Dunbar's original genius,—credit to which he is hardly entitled. Little invention was in fact required for the composition, which is merely a literary adaptation of the "Dance of Death," a long-established pageant in the carnivals of the Continent. Lord Hailes observes: "The drawing of the picture is bold, the figures well grouped I do not recollect ever to have seen the 'Seven Deadly Sins' painted by a more masterly pencil than that of Dunbar." In the grouping of the sins the Scottish allegorist merely followed the usual theological order; and, as regards the drawing, no reader of the *Vision of Piers the Plowman* will be prepared to admit that there can be

[1] Armed.

any comparison between Langland's portrait of "Envy"[1] and the following description :—

Next in the dance followit Envy,
Filled full of feud and felony,
   Hid malice and despite ;
For privy hatred that traitor tremlit,
Him followit mony freik dissemlit
   With fenyeit wordis quite :
And flatterers in to men's faces,
And backbiters in secret places,
   To lie that had delight ;
And rownards of false leasings,[2]
Alace ! the courts of noble kings
   Of them can never be quit.

Scarcely less celebrated as a poet in his own age than Dunbar, and certainly on the whole a more important figure for the historian of poetry, Gavin Douglas heralds the introduction into the chivalrous school of allegory of the classical style, which received its fullest development from the hands of Spenser.[3] Born in 1474, the third son of Archibald, fifth Earl of Douglas, known as "Bell the Cat," Gavin, who was intended for the Church, received a careful education in all the liberal arts of the time. He matriculated in the University of St. Andrews in 1489 ; took his degree of Determinant or Bachelor of Arts in 1492, and of Licentiate or Master of Arts in 1494. On leaving the University he entered into priest's orders, and, after receiving several minor appointments, was made dean of the Collegiate Church of St. Giles in Edinburgh in 1501, between which date and 1513, the year of the battle of Flodden, was comprised the period of his literary activity. His earliest extant work, *The Palace of Honour*, was written in 1501 ; *King Hart* may have been composed in any subsequent year before 1512, when Gavin began his translation of the *Æneid*, which he completed in 1513. Of his later history, full as it was of turbulence, intrigue, and personal disappointment, it is unnecessary to say more than that, having been

[1] See pp. 240-41.
[2] Whisperers of false lies.
[3] An edition of G. Douglas's works, in 4 vols. by J. Small, was published in 1874.

appointed to the bishopric of Dunkeld in 1516, he took part with the Earl of Angus in his struggle with Queen Margaret and the Regent Albany, and coming to London in 1521, to negotiate with Wolsey on his nephew's behalf, died there of the plague in 1522. He was buried in the Hospital Church of the Savoy, and the brass tablet, which once marked the place where his body was interred, is still preserved in the Savoy Chapel.[1]

The Palace of Honour, poor as a composition, is historically interesting as marking the transition from the old allegory on the subject of love, to the moral style which came into favour through the influence of the Classical Renaissance Here, as in Dunbar's *Golden Targe*, we find the poet preserving the conventional machinery of allegory: the ideal landscape, the Vision, the complaint about the cruelty of Fortune (of whom at this period Gavin had certainly no personal right to complain), and the Court of Venus, in which he is put upon his trial for writing a ballad against the goddess and her votaries. In this part of the poem it is noticeable that Venus is the prominent personage; that Amor, or Cupid, or Love, who in the earlier allegories is sovereign of the court, occupies a subordinate place; while the poet actually disputes the competence of the tribunal on two grounds: first, that *ladies may not be judges;* and, secondly, that Gavin himself, being "a spiritual man," is not accountable to a lay court.[2] Judgment is about to be given against the poet, who fears that he will be put to death or transformed into a beast, when suddenly the Court of the Muses appears upon the scene, and, at the intercession of Calliope,

[1] The inscription is interesting: "Here lies Thomas Halsey, Bishop of Leighlin, confessor of the English nation in the Church of St Stephen at Rome, who left this only thing after him, while he lived, he lived well. On whose left lies Gavan Dolkglas, by birth a Scot, Bishop of Dunkeld, an exile from his native land," 1522

[2] Madame, ye may not sit into this case,
For ladies may be judges in na place,
And mairatour I am na secular,
A spirituall man (though I be void of lair)
Cleipit I am, and ought my lives spare
To be remit to my judge ordinair.

Gavin is pardoned, on condition that he shall compose a ballad in praise of Love. Promptly complying with this requirement, he is then taken by the Muse on a tour round the habitable world, in the course of which he comes to a rock of "hard marble stone," shining like glass in the sun, on which is built the Palace of Honour. This he ascends with the help of his guide, but near the top he beholds the place of punishment for idle people, the sight of which fills him with so much alarm, that he is only prevented from making his way down by Calliope, who, seizing him by the hair of his head, "as Abacuk was brought to Babylon," drags him to the top. There he beholds the tempestuous sea of the world with a "lusty ship" tossing upon it, which Calliope, who, though a pagan Muse, is well versed in the dogmas of the Christian religion, informs him is the "carwell," or ship, of the state of Grace, necessary for man's salvation. A minute description of the Palace of Honour follows, in the course of which the poet finds an opportunity to enumerate all the leading characters of sacred and secular history, together with the cardinal and theological virtues, and to show his knowledge of the Ptolemaic system. Having penetrated through the gates of the castle, he is on the point of following "his nymph" over a narrow bridge into an inner enclosure, when (happily for the reader) he falls into the moat, which wakes him from his dream, and enables him to end his poem with a ballad in praise of honour and virtue.

King Hart is an allegory descriptive of the progress of human life, in which the various faculties of the body and mind are impersonated. The idea was suggested by that description of the Castle of Inwyt in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman* which furnished Spenser with his allegory of the Lady Alma and the House of Temperance in the *Faerie Queen*.[1] *King Hart* shows a great advance on *The Palace of Honour* in narrative power and in

[1] *Piers the Plowman* (Skeat, vol. i. p. 265). Langland himself borrowed some ideas from an old English Homily called *Sawles Warde*, for which see Morris, *Old English Homilies*, p. 245.

versification. The influence of the study of Virgil is particularly visible in the metrical syntax, and though the vocabulary is exceedingly archaic, yet compared with the hobbling verse of contemporary English poets, like Hawes, Skelton, and Barclay, the rhythmical movement in Douglas's stanzas is the very soul of melody, as may be seen from the opening of the poem :—

> King Hart, into his cumlie castell strang,
> Closit about with craft and mickle ure,
> So semlie was he set his folk amang
> That he no doubt had of misáventure :
> So proudlie was he polist, plane and pure,
> With youthhead and his lusty levis grene ;
> So fair, so fresh, so likely to endure,
> And als so blyth as bird in simmer schene.

Here it will be observed that nothing is wanting to develop the measure into the nine-line stanza used in the *Faerie Queene* but an added Alexandrine. The eight-line stanza had been introduced into English poetry by Chaucer, who took it from the French ; but a great advance is noticeable in Douglas's versification both as regards swiftness of movement and disposition of accent. The first of these improvements is due to the protraction of the sentence. Instead of a number of short sentences, many of them confined within one line, and few of them extended beyond two, a single sentence, linked together by subordinate clauses in the Latin fashion, may now, as in the example just given, be carried through a whole stanza. The more regular distribution of the accent is due to the disappearance, from the Northern dialect used by Douglas, of the final *e*, the surviving symbol of inflection ; and also to the fact that, in many of the words imported from the French, the accent, forced to follow the Teutonic law, has been removed from the final syllable to one of the syllables of the stem. Thus the following words which in Chaucer's verse would have been usually, if not invariably, pronounced Pleasánce, Jealousýe, Honoúr, Mirroúr, Natúre, Discretioún, Tresoúr, Beauté, Pité, become in *King Hart*, Pleásance, Jélousy, Hónour,

Mírrour, Náture, Discrétion, Treásour, Beaútye, Pítie. The alteration in the general rhythmical effect may be gathered from a comparison of the following stanza from Chaucer's *Fortune* with that from *King Hart* already cited :—

O Socrates, thou stedfast champioun,
She never mighte be thy tormentour ;
Thou never dreddest hir oppressioun,
Ne in her chere founde thou no savour.
Thou knewe wel the deceit of hir colour,
And that hir mostë worshipe is to lye.
I knowe hir eek a fals dissimulour,
For fynally, Fortune, I thee defye !

Gavin Douglas anticipates Spenser, not only in his metrical style, but also in his use of allegory as a method of interpreting nature. As the expectation of the approaching end of the visible world, which had for so many centuries haunted the imagination of men, waned, the desire to realise the nature of the unseen universe also began to disappear, leaving, however, behind it, in minds of a religious temper, a profound sense of the vanity of mortal things. This feeling, blended with the growing habit of moral reflection and the quickened perception of beauty, was fostered by the love which the pioneers of the Renaissance entertained for Virgil, an author whose depth of religious sentiment was only equalled by his profound knowledge of the resources of his art. No poet, not even Dante himself, ever drank more deeply of the spirit of Virgil than Gavin Douglas. Deeply versed in Catholic doctrine, he read into his theological studies the gravity, the melancholy, the sweetness, of his master in poetry. He showed his love for him by turning the *Æneid* for the first time into English ten-syllable rhyming couplets, and even more by the sentiment and style of the original Prologues which he prefixed to each book of his translation. Particularly notable are the Prologues to the sixth and seventh books. In the former, while he proclaims his fervent belief in the Christian religion, he indignantly rebukes those who regard the tale of Æneas' descent to the nether world as a narrative of "ghosts and

brownies," and maintains that the sixth book of the *Æneid* is an inspired allegory of the future life. The Prologue to the seventh book contains a description of winter of extraordinary beauty and power, showing how thoroughly Douglas had learned from Virgil the art of associating human feelings with the varying aspects of external nature. He describes how in winter—

> Rivers run on spait with water brown
> And burnis hurlis all their bankis down;

and how—

> O'er craggis and the front of roches sere
> Hang gret ice schoklis[1] lang as ony spere;

and again,—

> So bustuysly[2] Boreas his bugle blew,
> The deer full dern[3] doun in the dalis drew.
> *Small byrdis flocking through thick ronnis thrang,*
> In chyrming and with cheping changed their sang.
> Seeking hidlis and hemys thaime to hyde
> From fearfull thudis of the tempestuous tyde.[4]

While he lay awake,—

> The wyld geese, clacking eke by nichtis tyde,
> Above the citie flying heard I glyde.

As the night wore on,—

> Approaching near the greiking[5] of the day,
> Within my bed I wakened where I lay.
> So fast declinis Cynthia the moon,
> And kais keklis on the roof aboon[6]
> Palamedes' byrdis, crouping in the sky,
> Flying at random, shapen like a Y,
> And as a trumpet rang their voices soun,
> Whose crying bene pronosticatioun
> Of windy blastis and ventosities.

All this is quite in the spirit of the first *Georgic;* and Douglas goes on to assimilate these appearances of nature to his own mood:—

[1] Icicles. [2] Boisterously. [3] Secretly.
[4] Small birds flocking through thick brambles thronged, cheeping and piping as they changed their song, and sought hiding-places and corners to shelter them from the blasts of the tempestuous weather
[5] The dawn, the gray. [6] Jackdaws cackle.

And as I bound me to the fyre me by,
Both up and down the house I did espy,
And seeing Virgill on a lectern stand,
To write anon I hynt a pen in hand,
For to perform the poet grave and sad,
Whom so far forth, ere then, begun I had,
And wox annoyit some dele in my hart
There rested incomplete so gret a part.
And to myself I said: "In guid effect
Thou man draw forth, the yoke lies on thy neck."
Within my mind compassing thought I so,
No thing is done while ought remains to do.[1]

We naturally think by contrast of poor Lydgate's groan over his translation of the *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum*.[2]

It is depressing to turn from the noble and musical, if archaic, versification of Douglas, to the work of his English contemporaries, Hawes, Skelton, and Barclay, poets in whom the principle of metrical harmony, as practised by Chaucer, seems to have almost perished. Nevertheless, if the compositions of these men be regarded as monuments of the march of thought, and as stages in the development of our poetry, they are by no means without historical interest.

The Pastime of Pleasure was an allegory written in the twenty-first year of Henry VII.'s reign by Stephen Hawes, of whom little is known but that he was groom of the king's chamber, and a native of Suffolk, and that, after having studied at Oxford, he completed his education by travels in France.[3] The poem is divided into sections after the manner of Malory's translation of the *Mort d'Arthure*, which romance—one of the earliest productions of Caxton's press—evidently suggested to Hawes the character of his composition. Graunde Amoure, the hero of the story, meets with Fame, who tells him of a peerless

[1] A reminiscence of Lucan, *Pharsalia*, ii. 657:—

Nil actum credens, cum quid superesset agendum.

[2] See p. 324.

[3] An edition of the *Pastime of Plessure*, by Mr. Thomas Wright, was published by the Percy Society in 1843.

damsel, called La Bell Pucell, shut up in the Tower of Music, and fills him with desire to go in quest of her. To help him in his adventure, Fame leaves him two greyhounds (the favourite dog of Romance) Grace and Governance, and these bring him to the Tower of Doctrine or Science, who introduces him to grammar, logic, and rhetoric—the arts which formed the trivium—and to arithmetic. Fortified with this preliminary training in the art of love, Graunde Amoure finds La Bell Pucell in the Tower of Music, and holds with her "a dolorous and lowly disputation." Chapters nineteen and twenty recount "How La Pucell graunted Graunde Amoure love, and of her dispiteous departage" from the Tower of Music; and "Of the great sorrow that Graunde Amoure made after her departyng, and of the words of Counsayl." Whether to console himself for the absence of his lady, or to become more worthy of her regard, Graunde Amoure next takes to the study of geometry and astronomy, and, having thus completed the quadrivium, is knighted by a certain King Melazyus. Leaving the court of this monarch, he is overtaken by one False Report, who has changed his name to Godfrey Gobilive, and speaks evil of women; and in this very bad company Graunde Amoure comes to the temple of Venus, where he puts up a "supplication." Venus, having addressed a letter on his behalf to La Bell Pucell, despatches it to her by Cupid, while the accomplished knight shows his chivalrous prowess by slaying (for no very apparent reason) a couple of giants, one with three and the other with seven heads. After a long probation he marries La Bell Pucell, and lives happily with her for many years, till he is arrested by Age, who brings with him Policy and Avarice. Finally he is arrested by Death, and Remembrance writes his epitaph, in a vein by no means usual on mortuary monuments, since, instead of dilating on the virtues of this deceased knight, it dwells at great length upon the seven deadly sins.

The Pastime of Pleasure is a strange compound of

several literary styles. For the main motive, the education of Graunde Amoure, Hawes is indebted to Martianus Capella's *Marriage of Mercury and Philology*; the character of the narrative is suggested, as has been already observed, by Malory's *Mort d'Arthure*; while a lingering tradition of the chivalrous allegory is preserved from Lydgate's *Temple of Glass*, of which Hawes was a great admirer.[1] His story, however, shows how completely the life of this tradition had died out of the "machines." Graunde Amoure and La Bell Pucell have got on excellent terms with each other long before Venus appears upon the scene, and the letter addressed by the goddess to the lady, warning her against cruelty, is obviously entirely superfluous. The style of the composition is as languid and prolix as might be expected from its motive, and the versification gives no sign of the approach of Surrey. One beautiful image has survived the insipidities of which the poem is mainly composed, and has secured a place in the national memory:—

> For though the dayës be nevir so long,
> At last the bellës ringeth to evensong.

But as a whole the intellectual atmosphere we breathe makes us feel that life has been crushed out of feudalism by the Wars of the Roses; that Henry VII. is king; and that the brilliant, if fantastic, ideal of the knight has been replaced by the hollow artifices of the courtier.

We are brought to the same conclusion, though by a different path, in reading the poems of John Skelton, a writer whose position and career offer in some respects

[1] The manner in which Hawes speaks of Lydgate shows the mechanical spirit of his own allegory:—

> Whose fatall fictions are yet permanent,
> Grounded on reason with cloudy figures
> He cloked the trouth of all his Scryptures.
>
> The lyght of trouth I lacke cunnyng to cloke,
> To drawe a curtayne I dare not presume,
> Nor hyde my matter with a misty smoke,
> My rudeness cunnyng doth so sore consume:
> Yet as I may I shall blow out a fume,
> To hyde my mynde underneath a fable,
> By covert colours well and probable.

a parallel to the fortunes of Dunbar in Scotland. Born of an old family in Norfolk, about 1460, Skelton took his M.A. degree at Cambridge in 1484, and some time before 1490 received at Oxford the laureateship, a special degree conferred for proficiency in grammar and versification.[1] His reputation as a man of learning and letters procured for him the appointment of tutor to Prince Henry, afterwards Henry VIII., for whom he composed a treatise called *Speculum Principis*, which is not extant. While discharging this duty he was complimented by Erasmus, who, in a preamble to an ode addressed to Prince Henry, calls Skelton *Britannicarum literarum lumen ac decus*. He took orders in 1498, and held the rectory of Diss in Norfolk in the early years of the sixteenth century. When he began to compose in English verse is uncertain, but since it appears from an entry in the Cambridge Registers, in 1504, that, as laureate in that university, he was allowed to wear a dress given him by the king, it may perhaps be assumed that, at the date just named, he had like Dunbar a recognised appointment as court poet. A satirical allusion in Barclay's *Ship of Fools* to the *Dirge of Philip Sparrow* shows that the latter poem must have been written before 1508, and it is reasonable to suppose that *The Bowge of Court* was the fruit of the same period. His reputation was at its height in 1520, about which time he composed at Sheriff Hutton, in Yorkshire, the seat of the Duke of Norfolk,—probably at the instance of the Countess of Richmond, grandmother of Henry VIII.,—his *Garland of Laurel*, an allegorical poem in praise of himself and his works. When the star of Wolsey began to rise, Skelton panegyrised him in a dedication prefixed to his *Boke of the Three Foles;* but his *Colin Clout*, written apparently shortly before 1520, contains several strokes at the Cardinal; and, whatever the cause may have been, his enmity in later years was openly expressed in the bitter satire and

[1] See the life prefixed to Mr. Dyce's edition of his works, published in two vols. (1856).

invective of *Why come ye not to Court?* and *Speke, Parrot.* Pursued by the anger of Wolsey, Skelton took refuge in Westminster, where he was protected by Abbot Islip till his death, which took place in 1529.

In the verse of Skelton scarcely a trace of chivalrous sentiment, or of the polished style of composition introduced by Chaucer, can be found. Such talent as he possessed was for burlesque. He finds pleasure in abasing ideals that have been hitherto reverenced and admired, travestying, for example, in *Philip Sparrow*, the services of the Church, the sentiment of the romances, and the ostentation of encyclopædic learning. He imitates the manner of Langland—though without his moral purpose—in his impersonations, which are evidently portraits taken from real life. The figure of Riot in *The Bowge of Court* is painted with hardly less vigour than that of Covetyse in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman:*

Wyth that came Ryotte, russhying all at ones,
  A rusty gallande, to-ragged and to-rente;
And on the borde he whyrled a payre of bones,
  Quater trêye dews he clatered as he wente;
  Now have at all, by saynte Thomas of Kente.
And ever he threwe and kyst, I wote nere what:
His here was growen thorowe oute his hat.

Thenne I behelde how he disgysed was:
  His hede was hevy for watchynge over nighte,
His eyen blered, his face shone lyke a glas;
  His gowne so short that it ne cover mighte
  His rumpe, he wente so all for somer lyghte.
His hose were garded with a lyste of grene,
Yet at the knee they were broken, I wene.

Sometimes, as in the *Tunning of Eleanor Rumming*, he imitates low life with all the coarse relish of a Dutch painter. To Langland he probably owes his conception of Colin Clout, a plain countryman who simply collects and reports the hard things which the common folk say of the higher clergy.

With such motives of composition it would be of course idle to look in Skelton's verse for any refinement of style. He probably felt that Chaucer's artificial system

of versification, depending largely on the preservation of the symbol of inflection, was no longer suitable to the actual state of the language; it is at any rate certain that his more serious compositions in this style are utterly void of harmony. On the other hand, his short verses, which are characteristic of his genius, though affording a very proper vehicle for his low burlesque conceptions, are poured forth extemporaneously without any attempt at rhythmical balance. A flash of thought seems to provoke caprices of rhyme, and one rhyme is tumbled upon another, often with very little regard to sense, until the poet's fancy, unfettered by form and order, lights haphazard on some fresh combination of sound. Every movement is rude, anarchical, arbitrary, the work of a man who feels that the time-honoured metrical instrument is no longer adequate for the expression of his ideas, and who throws it aside because he wants faith and patience to adapt it to the new condition of things. The following extract, setting forth the purpose of *Colin Clout*, may be taken as a type of Skeltonical verse:—

> But if ye stand in doute
> What brought this rhyme aboute,
> My name is Colin Cloute.
> I purpose to shake oute
> All my connyng bagge,
> Lyke a clerkely hagge,
> For though my ryme be ragged,
> Tattered and jagged,
> Rudely rayne-beaten,
> Rusty and moughte-eaten,
> If ye take well therewith,
> It hath in it some pyth.
> For as farre as I can se,
> It is wrong with eche degre
> For the temporalte
> Accuseth the spiritualte,
> The spiritual agayne
> Doth grudge and complayne
> Upon the temporal men:
> Thus eche of other blother,
> The tone agayng the tother.
> Alas! they make me shoder
> For in noder moder

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Doth grudge and complayne
Upon the temporal men·
Thus eche of other blother,
The tone agayng the tother.
Alas! they make me shoder
For in noder moder

The Church is put in faute;
The prelates ben so haute,
They say and loke so hy,
As though they wolde fly
Above the starry skye.

Alexander Barclay, the last of the purely mediæval English allegorists, was in all respects the opposite of Skelton, whom he more than once satirises in his verse.[1] A monk and a moralist, he may have been scandalised at Skelton's offences against decency in word and deed; he was no doubt incensed by his attacks upon his own order. He himself was born in Scotland about 1476, but crossed the Border to complete his education at one of the English universities, probably Cambridge; after which, as he tells us in one of his *Eclogues*, he travelled on the Continent. In the early years of the sixteenth century he was chaplain in the Monastery of St. Mary Ottery, Devonshire, and here, in 1508, he translated Sebastian Brandt's *Ship of Fools*. His *Eclogues* were written in all probability about 1514; and in 1520 he was summoned to France to devise "histories" for the Field of the Cloth of Gold. After leaving the Monastery of Ottery St. Mary's in 1511, he seems to have become a monk of the Order of St. Benedict at Ely. He afterwards entered the Franciscan convent at Canterbury, where he remained till the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539. In 1546 he became vicar of Much Badew in Essex, and of St. Matthew at Wokey, Somerset. Appointed rector of All Hallows, Lombard Street, on the 30th April 1552, he had scarcely time to enter on his new duties when he died on the 10th of June in the same year, and was buried at Croydon in the neighbourhood of which he had lived during his early manhood.[2]

Barclay is a writer of little originality. Almost all his extant works are translations or adaptations of other

[1] See *Eclogue* iv., in which he calls him a "graduate" of "Stinking Thais"; and the last stanza of *The Ship of Fools*.

[2] A notice of Barclay's life by T. H. Jamieson was published in 1874. His writings have not been published in a collected form, but an edition of *The Ship of Fools* by Jamieson was issued in 1874.

men's inventions. His first undertaking was a translation of Pierre Gringoire's *Château de Labour*, made in 1506, in which he simply followed his author's text. In the *Ship of Fools* he allowed himself more latitude. His original, Sebastian Brandt's *Stultifera Navis*, was one of those works which are produced only in the decline of a great system of human thought. Except that it is written in the dialect of Suabia, there is nothing in its conception and execution to show that the author was of any particular nation. It is as comprehensive in its view of humanity as the *Inferno* itself; and its scholastic classification of the various kinds of folly is based upon the methods recognised in the encyclopædic education of the Church. All sorts and conditions of men are touched by the satire, so that, as far as the subject goes, the poem is of universal interest. But in respect of poetical treatment Brandt and Dante cannot be named together. The invention shown in *Stultifera Navis* is of the poorest. Intent upon a commonplace moral, the author, having once conceived the idea of separating fools into distinct classes and putting them on board ship for exportation, takes no trouble to give his allegory any further development, and says nothing of the different countries to which the passengers are bound. Nevertheless the matter of the book—the first original work of importance issued from the German press—and the numerous and humorous engravings by which it was illustrated, secured for it a vast audience. It had been translated into most European languages before Barclay introduced it to English readers; and his announcement of the purpose of his translation shows that he expected to hit the taste of a circle much wider than that which was usually interested in the romances and allegories of the time:—

My speche is rude, my termes comon and rurale,
And I for rude peple moche more convenient,
Than for estates, learned men, or eloquent.

In order to flavour his poem, Barclay aimed rather at paraphrase than literal reproduction, and made additions

at will, enlivening his descriptions with touches of local and personal colour, and his morality with a large collection of English proverbs. Hence, while his work as a whole is now quite unreadable, it is not without value for the antiquary.

There is more life in his *Eclogues.* Since the days of Virgil the pastoral dialogue, invented by Theocritus, had been employed for the purposes of literary allegory. Under the disguise of shepherds, Virgil made delicate complimentary allusions to his own contemporaries, and his successors Calpurnius and Nemesianus improved his device into grosser forms of flattery. In later times ecclesiastics, like Mantuan, influenced by the spirit of the Renaissance, converted the artificial *naïveté* of Virgil's rustics to moral purposes, and made the eclogue an instrument for satirising the manners of the court or the city. Barclay had the merit of perceiving that the vein of thought running through these Latin compositions might be reproduced in the vulgar tongue. A monk, a scholar, and a moralist, devoted to the service of the Church, he felt instinctively that, in the great change which was transforming society, the court was "the enemy." While in his pastoral poems he appears to be simply rehearsing the debates of shepherds, he is in reality contrasting the conflicting standards of civil and monastic life. The first three Eclogues, adapted from the *Miseriæ Curialium* of Æneas Silvius, are occupied with a discussion between Corydon, a young shepherd who, dissatisfied with his lot, proposes to seek his fortunes at court, and Cornix, his senior, who dissuades him from his purpose by a recital of his own experience. The picture which the latter draws of the contemporary life of courts is extremely interesting, but the main intention of the poet is shown in such passages as the following:—

But of our purpose now for to speake agayne,
Few princes give that to which them selfe attayne.
Trust me, Corydon, I tell thee by my soule,
They robbe Saint Peter therwith to cloth Saint Powle.
And like as dayly we both may see and here,

> Some pill[1] the churche, therewith to leade the quere.
> While men promoted by such rapine are glad,
> The wretches pilled mourne, and be wo and sad.

These covetous aims, says the poet, are contrary to the spirit of Christianity:—

> Thus ought we to live as having all in store,
> But nought possessing, or caring nought therefore,
> What should christen men seeke farther for richesse?
> Having food and cloth it is ynough doubtlesse,
> And these may our lord give unto us truely,
> Without princes service or courtly misery.

In the course of the debate he takes occasion to pay high compliments to "Shepherd Morton," Archbishop of Canterbury in the reigns of Richard III. and Henry VII., and to Alcock, Bishop of Ely, his own diocesan. The Fourth Eclogue, adapted from Mantuan, rehearsing a dialogue between Codrus, a rich shepherd, and Menalcas, who has the gift of poetry, treats of "the behaviour of riche men agaynst poets." This gives Barclay the opportunity for a bitter attack on Skelton, whom he accuses of pandering to the depraved tastes of the court.[2] In the same Eclogue he inserts, after Virgil's manner, an elegy in praise of Sir Edward Howard, Lord High Admiral, second son of the Duke of Norfolk,[3] who in 1513 was killed in an attack on the French fleet in the harbour of Brest. The Fifth Eclogue contains a debate between Amyntas and Faustus, in which the interlocutors balance against each other, in true scholastic fashion, the respective advantages of city and country life It is needless to say that Faustus, the champion of the rural or monastic side of the argument, has much the better of the encounter. He concludes with a moral full of Virgilian pessimism, and very characteristic of Catholic sentiment:—

[1] Plunder.

[2] Another thing is yet greatly more damnable,
Of rascolde poetes yet is a shamfull rable,
Which voide of wisdome presumeth to indite,
Though they have scantly the cunning of a snite [snipe],
And to what vices that princes most intende,
That dare these fooles solemnize and commende.

[3] Warton says wrongly that the elegy was in honour of the Duke of Norfolk, who survived his son several years.

Alas! Amyntas, nought bideth that is good,
No, not my cokers, my tabert,[1] nor my hood;
All is consumed, all spent and worne be,
So is all goodnesse and welthe of the cyté.
The temples pylled dothe bytterly complayne,
Poore people wayleth, and cal for helpe in vayne;
Poore wydous sorowe, and chyldren fatherles
In vayne bewayleth, whan wolves them oppresse.
Syn hath no scourge and vertu no rewarde,
Who loveth wisdom his fortune is but harde!
Counceyll and cunnyng now tombles in the dust:
But what is the cause? lawe tourned is to lust:
Lust standeth in stede of lawe and of justyce;
Whereby good lyvynge subdued is by vyce.

This is the predominant note in Barclay's *Eclogues:* the bucolic style is adopted by him merely as the vehicle of a moral allegory. Of that more poetical form of allegory in pastoral compositions (examples of which are found in Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, and even in Gavin Douglas's *Prologues*) whereby the varying aspects of external nature are made to reflect the changes of human life, no traces can be detected in his verse. Nor can he claim any praise as an inventor of metrical harmony. Writing, like Skelton, at a time when Chaucer's system of versification had become inapplicable to the altered conditions of the vocabulary, he shows no sense of the rhythmical changes which were required by the almost total disappearance from the spoken language of the sign of inflection.[2] The extracts which have been made above from his *Eclogues* demonstrate that, so long as his lines contained five accents, he was content, without caring whether the line was measured by an equal number of syllables, or whether the accent fell in its proper place.

From the foregoing account it will be seen that the development of allegory reflects very accurately the internal changes that modified the structure of society and men's system of thought during the fourteenth and fifteenth

[1] No, not my boots, or my smock-frock.

[2] In the extract from the Fifth Eclogue the only words, other than past participles in *ed*, in which the inflected syllable is not suppressed, are "wolvës," "wornë." Even the *e* of the past participles is sometimes suppressed, as in "pyll'd," "consum'd."

centuries. Allegory, as it was understood and used by Dante, the accepted method of interpreting nature and Scripture, derived from the Platonised theology of the fifth and sixth centuries, and methodised in the system of the Schoolmen, first becomes a mechanical part of poetry, and then slowly falls into disuse, in proportion as the scholastic logic itself gives way before the new experimental tests applied to the interpretation of nature. Allegory again, regarded as a literary form of expression, has its original source in the genius for abstraction peculiar to the Latin language, which encouraged the use of the figure of personification in poetry. In this sphere it enjoyed a longer life than in philosophy. Employed by Christian writers like Prudentius, and by Platonic philosophers in favour with the Church, such as Martianus Capella and Boethius, it grew, in the Middle Ages, into a stereotyped form of composition in consequence of the vast popularity of the *Romance of the Rose;* while the tendency to multiply abstract personages was increased by the study of the Latin poets, and particularly Ovid. Lastly, the habit, common to the mediæval poets, of inventing allegories, in which all these abstract personages should be grouped round the central figure of Love, had, doubtless, its far-off origin in the metaphysical conception of Eros pervading the Platonic philosophy. Translated in the sixth century into semi-theological language, through the writings of the so-called Dionysius the Areopagite, which were made generally known to Western Europe by Scotus Erigena in the ninth century, this conception of Love afterwards took form in the *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum* of St. Bonaventura, and through this channel became one of the inspiring sources of the *Vita Nuova* and *Paradiso* of Dante. A stream of kindred sentiment, springing from the same source, coloured the whole code of chivalrous manners; and, from the new impulse thus given to the ancient Teutonic reverence for women, the troubadours, by the aid of Ovid and of models borrowed from the Arabs, developed the elaborate system of Provençal love poetry. The lyrical fervour of the Provençals, in the cooling

atmosphere of the times, gradually became in its turn conventional and didactic; and the long series of allegories following the *Romance of the Rose* is mainly interesting as marking the fall of temperature in the institutions of chivalry. In the tide of symbolism itself, however, there is at present no ebb. While the genius of the troubadour declines, together with the enthusiasm of the monk, allegorical matter receives an infusion of fresh life from the rationalising tendencies of the Renaissance, and allegorical form is enriched by contributions from moralities, masks, and pageants, the chief entertainments of the court, and by the imagery of the classic pastoral.

CHAPTER X

THE RISE OF THE DRAMA IN ENGLAND

THERE is a close and intimate connection between the progress of allegory and the rise of the drama in England. Religious in its primitive character, the drama was the product of the allegorical interpretation of nature sanctioned by Christian theology; didactic in its original purpose, its development was largely due to the principle of personification, which, in the scholastic atmosphere of the times, propagated its species with such surprising fertility. Both in its theological beginnings and its didactic aim, the history of the English drama offers a striking parallel to the growth of the Attic stage, and shows how general are the laws which govern the course of the human imagination[1]

Two conditions seem to be indispensable to the rise of a great national theatre: on the one hand, a wide-spread religious belief, accompanied by splendour of religious ritual; on the other, flexibility of imagination, enabling the dramatist to give form, life, and individuality to the floating conceptions of the people. Both requirements were satisfied by Athenian genius, and Attic tragedy and comedy were the joint products of the religious spectacle of the Dionysia, and the succession of great inventors who interpreted the feelings of the spectators. The Romans, who had all the religious feelings and the religious ritual required for the production of the drama, lacked

[1] For details as to the history of the drama, the reader will do well to refer to the well-known histories of Collier and Ward, and to Mr A. W Pollard's *English Miracle Plays, Moralities, and Interludes*, which has an excellent Preface

artistic imagination. Formalists, lovers of abstraction, suppressing individual character in the cause of the State, they were unable to evolve from their indigenous customs that free conception of human action which gives birth to interesting dramatic situations. They admired the Greek drama without the power of emulating it, and, when their liberties were lost in the Empire, their dramatic sense could only be satisfied with spectacles of the most brutal materialism.

Hence, when society was reorganised on Christian principles, the stage, unencumbered by even a decaying theatrical tradition, was free for the production of a completely fresh dramatic type. Slowly and without artistic purpose, just as had been the case in Attica, the outlines of the new form began to disclose themselves. Its birth was due to the necessities of the Church, and its history illustrates the change in the character of dramatic action accomplished by the Christian interpretation of nature. The starting point of the modern drama is the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, regarded not simply as a miraculous fact, but as the central doctrine of the Christian faith, the crowning act in the scheme of Redemption, on which depended the future happiness or misery of every member of the human race. It had been the endeavour of the Christian clergy, from the earliest times, to bring home the reality of this cardinal event to the worshipper by means of the senses as well as of the reason. In the Easter services of the Church it was commemorated in the *Sepulchri Officium*, a solemn rite, in which the cross was buried and afterwards disinterred before the eyes of the congregation. From this mute symbolism the clergy passed to an actual representation, during the service, of the incidents connected with the Resurrection. After the Third Lesson on Easter Sunday there was a procession to the choir, in which was enacted a colloquy between the apostles and the holy women, the opening of which ran as follows:—

APOSTOLI—Dic nobis, Maria,
Quid vidisti in viâ.

PRIMA MARIA—Sepulcrum Christi viventis,
Et gloriam resurgentis.

SECUNDA MARIA—Angelicos testes,
Sudarium et vestes.

TERTIA MARIA—Surrexit Christus, spes mea,
Præcedit nos in Galilæam.

Dialogue of this kind naturally prepared the way for the representation in church of the whole drama of the Resurrection; and a play on the subject, evidently composed for the purpose of being performed during an interval of the service, is preserved in the library at Orleans. It must have been written before 1200, and no doubt followed some ancient model, for Miracle Plays in Latin of a much earlier date are extant, composed by one Hilarius, on the subjects of the History of Daniel, the Raising of Lazarus, and a miracle of St. Nicholas.

Dramatic instinct naturally led to the selection of themes for representation from the New as well as from the Old Testament; and prompted the dramatist to look for materials in the lives and actions of the saints. The earliest miracle play mentioned in England was the work of Geoffrey, afterwards Abbot of St. Albans, who composed it at Dunstable in honour of St. Katherine, probably before the close of the eleventh century; and before the end of the following century these performances must have become widely popular, for William Fitz Stephen, writing about 1182, contrasts the miracle plays exhibited in London with the spectacles of ancient Rome. For a long time the clergy, being able to keep the management of these dramas in their own hands, were favourable to their performance. In course of time, however, they came to view the religious dramas with mixed feelings. A passage from Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* shows that, in the first years of the fourteenth century, permission for the faithful to witness Miracle Plays was guarded with strict limitations.

Hyt ys forebode yn the decre
Miracles for to make or se
For miracles, yf you begynne,
Hyt is a gaderynt, a syght of synne.

He may yn the Cherche, thurgh thys resun,
Pley the resurrecyon;
That is to seye, how God ros,
God and man yn myght and los,
To make be yn beleve gode,
That he ros with flesshe and blode,
And he may pleye withouten plyght,
How God yn thole nyght
To make men to beleve stedfastly
That he lyght in the virgyne Mary
Yf thou do hyt in weyis or grenys
A syght of synne truly hyt semys.

From this we may see, first, how strictly didactic was the original purpose of these plays, and next that they were beginning to pass out of the hands of those who held themselves the only authoritative teachers of the people. By degrees the dramatic desire of making the exhibition as real and lifelike as possible prevailed over the symbolical motive; and when this point was reached the stage requirements became so numerous, that the play could no longer be conveniently combined with the service in church. The performance was accordingly shifted to the churchyard; but here the multitude of spectators led to the desecration of the graves. Another migration therefore took place, and finally the stage was pitched, as Robert of Brunne shows us, on the green, or some open place in the neighbourhood of the town, where the play was no longer under the direction of the clergy. It is possible that the opposition of the latter might have led to the suppression of the miracles, if it had not been for the decree of the Council of Vienne in 1311, reviving the observance of the Feast of Corpus Christi, instituted by Pope Urban in 1264. This festival now became as popular and as splendid as the Dionysia at Athens; for, as the exhibition of miracles was the favourite form of public amusement, the trade gilds throughout the country spared neither time nor money to celebrate their holiday in a manner worthy of the occasion. Certain districts gained celebrity for the zeal and efficiency of their performance: York, Wakefield, and Chester[1] in the North,

[1] The representation of the Chester Mysteries was at Whitsuntide.

and Coventry in the Midlands, were the chief centres of attraction; and, from the literary monuments these places have bequeathed to us, we are fortunately able to form a very complete picture of the rude beginnings of the English stage.

The order of the play was regulated by the municipal authorities of the district. When the day of the feast, the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday, approached, the mayor, as representing the king, made a proclamation, directing that all persons, with certain privileged exceptions, should attend at the exhibition without arms; that the performance should take place at the particular stations appointed, and nowhere else; that only well-qualified actors should be allowed to play; and that all players should be in their places, and ready to begin, by the hour named in the proclamation. The arrangements were left to the management of pageant masters, appointed by each of the gilds taking part in the performance, who were charged with the duty of choosing the actors, assigning the parts, and collecting from the craftsmen the money required to defray the expenses.

The subject of the play was the whole scheme of Redemption, from the Creation of the World to the Day of Judgment, and this had to be distributed into as many episodes as there were gilds sharing in the representation. Thus, in the surviving York Mystery, there are 48 different scenes, each of which is played by a separate gild; in the so-called Towneley Mystery, 30; in the Coventry Mystery, 42; and in the Chester Mystery, 25. From the close correspondence, in the distribution of the subject, that exists between the various cycles, it is plain that they must all have followed some archetype, which we may assume to have been drawn up with the sanction of the Church.

Assembling in the early hours, when the days were longest, the players, following the order prescribed by the authorities, set the first pageant in the place appointed for it, and, when it was ended, wheeled it away to another station, leaving its place to be occupied by the second; so

that, in this way, the whole drama of the Christian faith was enacted in successive scenes before the spectators in every part of the town. The stage consisted of a scaffold of two stories, the lower being used as the robing room for the players, the upper being open for the representation of the play. When the actors in this rude theatre had performed the part allotted to them, they sent word to those who were to follow them, and the audience waited patiently while another gild, without hurry or confusion, brought up along the prescribed line of march the next act in the drama. The constant circulation of the pageants, the fluctuating crowds, the excitement of expectation, the varied episodes of the play, the richness of the dresses, the emulation of the actors, all blended with the wonder, the enthusiasm, and the devotional feeling of the spectators, must have rendered the feasts of Corpus Christi and Whitsuntide memorable events in the life of the people.

Regarded as the germ of the English drama, the Miracle Play, both in its conception and in its technical machinery, bears the clearest marks of its religious origin. Its aim was didactic; its character symbolical. As its main object was to set before the people the meaning of the scheme of Redemption, the dramatist did not hesitate to place upon the stage impersonations of the most abstract conceptions of the mind. God, the nine orders of angels, the devil and his rebel host, were all introduced in the pageants; and the scene-painter did his best to furnish representations of their invisible abodes in heaven and hell. The acts of the Creator on the different days were conveyed to the mind by means of material symbols. Thus, when the separation of light from darkness was to be represented, the stage direction was, "Then shall be shown a painted cloth, that is to say one half white and the other black"; and for the creation of the fowls, "Then shall be secretly thrown into the air little birds flying, and there shall be set down on the ground geese, swans, ducks, cocks, hens, and other birds, with as many strange beasts as can be found." In order that the spectators might conceive the story as a whole, the representation was sometimes

preceded by a Prologue, in which proclamation was made by the sound of a trumpet, or by banner-bearers (*vexillatores*), showing the scenes which would be exhibited by the different gilds. As the whole story of the Redemption had to be represented in one day, it was necessary to compress the action of each of the pageants within narrow limits. This necessity, in days when the art of scene-shifting was unknown, must have taxed the invention of the pageant masters, since actions supposed to occur in different places had sometimes to be performed on the same stage. The effect of this rapid and condensed representation may be judged from the following extract from the *York Mysteries*, in which Pharaoh appears hardening his heart before Moses:

REX. Hopp illa hayle![1]
Now, certis, this is a sotil swayne,
But this boyes sall byde here in our bayle,
For all thair gaudis sall noght tham gayne;[2]
Bot warse, both morne and none,
Sall thei fare for thy sake.
MOYSES. God sende sum vengeance sone,
And on thi werke take wrake[3]
[*Moses retires: enter Egyptians.*
i. EGIP. Alas! Alas! this lande is lorne,
On lif we may no lenger lende[4]
ii EGIP. So grete mysscheffe is made sen morne,
Ther may no medycyne us amende
CONSOLL. Sir kyng, we banne[5] that we wer borne,
Our blisse is with bales blende[6]
REX. Why crys you swa, laddis? liste you scorne?
i. EGIP. Sir kyng, slyk[7] care was nevere kende
Our watir, that was ordand
To men and beestis fudde,[8]
Thurghout al Egipte lande
Is turned to rede blude;
Full ugly and full ill is it,
That was ful faire and fresshe before
REX This is grete wondir for to witte,
Of all the werkis that ever wore
ii. EGIP. Nay, lorde, ther is anothir yitt,

[1] Bless me!
[2] Their tricks shall not avail them.
[3] Vengeance.
[4] We may no longer remain alive.
[5] Curse.
[6] Mixed with evil.
[7] Such.
[8] Food.

That sodenly sewes[1] us ful sore;
For tadys and frosshis we may not flitte,[2]
Thare venim loses lesse and more.[3]
i. EGIP. Lorde, grete myses,[4] both morn and none,
Bytis us full bittirlye,
And we hope all by done[5]
By Moyses, oure enemy.
i. CONS. Lord, whils we with this menye meve,[6]
Mon never myrthe be us emange.
REX. Go saie we sall no lenger greve;
But thai sall nevere the tytare[7] gang. [*Aside*]
ii. EGIP. Moyses, my lord has grauntyd leve
At lede thy folk to likyng land,[8]
So that we mende of our myscheve.[9]
MOYSES. I wate full wele thar wordes er wrang,
That sall ful sone be sene,
For hardely I hym heete,
And he of malice mene.[10]
Mo mervayles mon he mett.

From this it is plain that the stage direction, "Moses retires,"[11] cannot have had the same effect as "Exit Moses," in the later drama; but that at this point Moses must have "retired" to seat himself at the far corner of the stage, and that the Egyptians must have carried Pharaoh's message to him, while the king was still before the spectators. It is probable, however, that means were sometimes taken to divide the stage by a partition; for in a pageant representing the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we find that the scene is "a chamber in Jerusalem; Mary and the apostles are assembled in it; the Jews headed by their doctors, are outside." The play represents the apostles conversing together inside the chamber, but the course of this action is at intervals suspended, while the Jews who are listening outside, carry on a dialogue among themselves; and after the descent of the Holy Spirit (represented it may be presumed by a dove) the apostles

1 Pursues.
2 We may not leave the house on account of toads and frogs.
3 Destroys small and great.
4 Lice.
5 We think it is all done.
6 While we dwell with this people.
7 The sooner.
8 To lead thy people out to the Promised Land.
9 On condition we are relieved of our misfortunes.
10 I dare swear he is thinking of malice.
11 This is of course only a modern insertion.

"open the door," and address the Jews.[1] With such slight exceptions, any attempts made to represent scenery on a stage open on every side must have been limited to what was necessary for the purposes of symbolism; in other words, the dramatist was satisfied with such an amount of external action as was required to make his dialogue intelligible to the audience.

From the predominantly symbolical character of the performance, we may see that, without the co-operation of external influences, the growth of the English theatre would have been arrested at a very early stage. On the same day of every year, the same pageant-scaffolds, carefully laid by, were brought out to be redecorated, and the time-honoured text-books were studied by actors, trained to gratify the taste of a popular audience, while the audience itself, with the conservatism of children, eagerly anticipated words and gestures imprinted on the memory by frequent repetition. In this respect a striking parallel and a curious contrast may be noted in the respective histories of the Greek and English drama. Both grew out of the exhibition of a religious ritual; the Attic choregus and the English pageant-master were animated by the same motive; a similar instinct of conservatism in the audience kept the invention of the Athenian dramatist within limits hardly less strict than those which were imposed on the author of the Miracle Play. The larger scope of invention and liberty enjoyed by the Greek arose from the nature of his religion. Though the chorus was originally no more than an assemblage of revellers, met to celebrate symbolically the worship of Dionysus, there was nothing in the rite to forbid the dramatic representation of stories about the god from being associated with hymns sung in his honour. And when the dramatist had once conceived the idea of impersonating a myth about the god before spectators, it was but a step to bring in the whole cycle of legends that made up the religion of the people. Nor was the Greek dramatist fettered in his conception by any system

[1] *York Plays*, edited by L. Toulmin Smith, pp 465-472.

of dogma beyond the broad outlines of the myth itself. Though instinct, custom, and the traditions of the drama forbade the Athenian tragedian to multiply the number of actors; yet, in the grouping of the incidents of the play round the protagonist, as well as in his relations to the other two actors and to the chorus, there was room for men of original genius to produce an almost endless variety of dramatic combinations. Had no other monument of the Attic stage been preserved to posterity than the myth in which Orestes is the central figure, we might still, from the different ways in which that subject has been handled by Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, obtain an insight into the gradual change of religious thought and feeling which transformed the character of Athenian society between the battle of Marathon and the Sicilian Expedition.

Far different was the position of the dramatist in the English Miracle Plays. He, in the first place, was restricted by the discipline of the Church to the representation of a single theme; in all the four great cycles of religious plays the subject embraces the whole moral history of man between the Creation of the World and the Day of Judgment. And not only so, but, even in the subdivisions of his subject, he was obliged to follow the selection of topics and episodes which had been imposed on him by tradition. Beyond this, he was confined by the necessity of strictly following the text of the canonical or apocryphal Scriptures. Finally, even if he had felt a desire to put his own rendering and interpretation on the materials he dealt with, he would scarcely have dared to do so. The fear of heresy would have caused the authorities in Church and State to repress sternly the aberrations of any dramatist bold enough to take liberties resembling those on which Euripides ventured in his treatment of the national faith.

In spite, however, of the stereotyped lines within which the miracle plays were restricted, the type admitted of certain modifications, which, under favourable conditions, prepared the way for the future development of the English

drama. Two circumstances in particular, of a contrary kind, encouraged the growth of dramatic variety and invention. In the first place, there was a desire to bring home the truth symbolised to the minds of the audience by making the representation as real as possible; and this devotional feeling, joined with the necessity of introducing a very large number of striking episodes and characters, led to the direct imitation of nature. Absolutely devoid of any sense of historical perspective, the dramatist and his audience sought simply to realise the most sublime and sacred scenes of Scripture narrative. They felt no impropriety in impersonating the Deity on the stage; and, unlike the Greeks, were so far from endeavouring to raise the actors above the stature of common life, by dress and machinery, that they introduced the most venerable personages in Scripture story feeling, acting, and speaking in a manner which everybody could understand. The wicked characters in all the plays swear "by Mahound." The shepherds, gazing at the heavenly host at the Nativity, express their feelings by such ejaculations as "We! hudde!" "We! howe!" "We! colle (oh! golly!)."[1] As many of the spectators would not have understood the terms "high priest," Annas and Caiaphas are called "bishops."[2] When Pilate is first approached by the leaders of the Jews he tells them they must bring their cause before him "in parliament."[3] In order to obtain a place for setting up the cross, negotiations have to be entered into with a "squire," who gives a lease of Calvary, but is cheated in the transaction.[4]

From this attention to the dramatic reality of the situation, and the consequent neglect of learned correctness, arose that tradition of *sans gêne*, which is characteristic of the English stage, and which manifests itself in the unconcern with which Shakespeare transforms a Roman into an English crowd, makes Hector quote Aristotle, and places Bohemia, when it suits his purpose, on the shore of the sea. These early dramatists, too, furnished the hints

[1] *York Plays* (L. T. Smith) p. 119.
[2] *Ibid* p 261.
[3] *Ibid.* p 308.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 318.

for all the nameless generic characters, which figure so prominently in Shakespeare's plays. His First and Second Citizens, Carriers, Gentlemen, and Soldiers have all of them prototypes in the pageants of the craftsmen; and, from the familiar talk by which the actors helped the townsfolk to realise the Scripture narrative, was generalised the style made classical in the mouths of Bottom, Dogberry, and Falstaff. No doubt the interval between the first rude suggestion and the final triumph of creation is immense. The sense of comedy in the miracle plays is most rudimentary, and never advances beyond the exhibition of a type. Every one of the playwrights of the Mysteries knew that his audience would not only permit, but would expect him to crack his joke about Noah's wife, to pile up his vocabulary in representing the vaunts of Herod, and to lighten the atmosphere of gloom and terror surrounding the Crucifixion with a sportive episode between Pilate and his wife Percula. Beyond this unambitious mark he did not attempt to shoot; nevertheless, even in aiming at this, he was anticipating the principle of the Shakespearian tragi-comedy.

The second tendency which led to the expansion of the drama was of an exactly opposite kind, namely, the impersonation on the stage of abstract ideas and qualities. In course of time the stage was invaded by the literary taste for allegory; and allegorical *dramatis personæ* found their way into the Miracle Play. The next step was to engage these symbolical beings in an action by themselves; and the result of this new invention was the Morality. Much less dramatic in spirit than the miracle plays, the Moralities, nevertheless, mark a stage in the evolution of the drama; for, in the Morality, the dramatist, no longer able to rely on the narrative of Scripture, was forced to invent his own plot, and, looking for models to the plays of Plautus and Terence, learned how to make the plot turn on the human interest of the situation. As the initial stage in this gradual evolution is very plainly shown in the successive cycles of the York, Towneley, and Coventry Miracle Plays, I propose to take the first as an example of the normal

type of Mystery; the second as illustrating the tendency of the imitative or comic element in the play to predominate over the symbolical; and the third as indicating the mode of transition from Miracles to Moralities.[1] The Chester cycle, which is, relatively speaking, deficient in individual character, need not be taken into account.

We find, in the first place, that there is not only a complete resemblance between all the cycles in their general framework, but also that, in each of them, the same range of subjects from the Old Testament is selected for representation. The episodes chosen from this part of Scripture are the Creation and Fall of Man, the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel, the Flood, Abraham's Sacrifice, and the Departure of the Israelites from Egypt.[2] This selection is evidently made for the purpose of symbolism, the prime intention of the dramatist being to illustrate from the narrative of the Old Testament the nature and effects of sin, as rendering necessary the sacrifice of the Redeemer, and also to set forth the types of the coming of the Messiah. In the York Mysteries the playwright, never losing sight of the doctrinal object of the whole scheme, has employed his dramatic powers to bring this out into just relief. His treatment of Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac, for example, shows that he intended to make the behaviour of Isaac a vivid type of the self-sacrifice of Christ. When Abraham announces to his son that he is to be the victim, there is no attempt on the part of the latter to thwart his father's will:—

ISAAC. But, fadir, now wolde I frayne[3] full fayne
Whar-of oure offerand shulde be grathed?[4]
ABRAHAM. Sertis, sone, I may no longer layne;[5]
Thy-selfe shulde bide that buter brayde.[6]

[1] For the *York Plays* see the admirable edition by Miss Lucy Toulmin Smith (1885); the *Towneley Mysteries*, edited by Mr. J. Raine for the Surtees Society (1836); and the *Ludus Coventriæ*, edited by Mr J O Halliwell for the Shakespeare Society (1841).

[2] The main variations from this scheme are the substitution in the Coventry Mysteries of Moses and the Two Tables of the Law, and, in the Chester Mysteries, of Balaam and his Ass, for the Departure of the Israelites from Egypt.

[3] Ask. [4] Prepared. [5] Deceive. [6] Bitter blow.

ISAAC. Why, fadir, wil God that I be slayne?
ABRAHAM. Ya, suthly, sone, so has he saide.
ISAAC. And I sall noght grouche ther agayne;
To werke his wil I am wel payed;[1]
Sen it is his desire,
I sall be bayne[2] to be
Brittynd and brent[3] in fyre,
And ther-fore morne noght for me.

Again, in the representation of the Deluge, advantage is taken of a time-honoured custom to make fun of Noah's wife; but on the whole the merriment is kept within bounds, and the scene of the flood is worked up to its proper symbolical climax. Noah's second son asks:—

Sir, nowe sen god, oure soverand sire,
Has sette his syne thus in certayne,
Than may we wytte this worldis empire
Shall evermore last, is noght to layne.[4]
NOAH. Nay, sonne, that sall we nought desire,
For and we do, we wirke in wane;[5]
For it sall ones be waste with fyre,
And never worthe to worlde agayne.[6]

Yet while thus always keeping in view the religious end of the play, the dramatist of this cycle shows himself a man of very considerable imaginative powers, which he exerts to the uttermost where he perceives that the emotions of the spectators can be properly heightened by the introduction of exciting incidents and stage effects. His arrangement of the series of scenes representing the Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus is, in its rude way, a masterpiece; and the skilful use made of the slight mention in the Gospel of Pilate's wife's dream, displays invention of a high order. As the death of Christ was necessary for man's redemption, the author felt that he must represent the interest of Satan to lie in preventing this death; and accordingly the dream of Pilate's wife became a necessary part of the action of his play. How vividly he conceived the situation may be judged from the following striking scene.—

1 Pleased. 2 Obedient. 3 To be cut up and burned.
4 Then may we know it is certain that this world's empire shall last for ever. 5 In vain. 6 And never become world again.

SCENE II. Chamber of Dame PERCULA, Pilate's Wife.

DOM. Nowe are we at home, do helpe yf ye may.
For I will make me redye and rayke to my reste.[1]
ANCILLA. Ye are werie, madame, for-wente of youre way:[2]
Do boune[3] you to bedde, for that holde I beste.
FILIUS. Here is a bedde arayed of the beste.
DOM. Do happe me,[4] and faste hense ye hye.
ANC. Madame, anone all dewly is dressed.
FIL. With no stalking nor no stryffe be ye stressed.[5]
DOM. Now be ye in pese, both youre carpyng and crye[6]

(*All sleep, enter* SATAN)

DIABOLUS. Owte! owte! harrowe! in-to bale am I brought.
This bargayne may I banne,
But yf I wirke some wyle, in wo mon I wonne.
This gentleman, Jesu, of cursednesse he can,
Be any sygne that I see, this same is Goddis sonne.
And he be slone our solace will sese.
He will save man saule fro our sonde,
And refe us the remys that are rounde.
I will on stiffely in this stounde
Unto Sir Pilate wiffe, pertely, and putte me in presse.
[*Whispers to* PERCULA.
O woman! be wise and ware, and wonne in thi witte,
Ther shall a gentilman, Jesu, un-justely be juged
Before thi husband in haste, and with harlottis be hytte.
And that doughty to-day to deth thus be dyghted,
Sir Pilate, for his prechyng, and thou
With nede shall ye namely be noyed,
Your striffe and your strengthe shall be stroyed,
Your richesse shall be refte you that is rude
With vengeance and that dare I avowe.[7]
[PERCULA *awakes, starting.*

---

[1] Go to my rest. [2] Over-done with your journey.
[3] Make you ready. [4] Wrap me up
[5] May you be disturbed by no walking about or quarrelling
[6] Peace both to your talking and crying.
[7] In this speech, as indeed in many others through the play, it is evident that the requirements of metrical composition imposed on the dramatist a task beyond the limits of his vocabulary. In finding rhymes and alliterations he often sacrifices sense to sound The text may be paraphrased· "Alas! alas! woe's me! I am brought to ruin. My curse on this business, for without some crafty device I must abide in misery. This gentleman, Jesus, knows so much craft: by every sign that I see this same is God's son If he be slain our hope is at an end. He will save man's soul from our power, and deprive us of the kingdoms round us I will now push on stiffly to Sir Pilate's wife, and get close to her [whispers to Percula]

DOM. A! I am drecchid[1] with a dreme full dredfully to dowte,[2]
Say, childe! rise uppe radly,[3] and reste for no roo;[4]
Thow muste launce[5] to my lorde and lowly hym lowte,[6]
Comaunde me to his reverence, as right will y doo.
FIL. O! what! shall I travayle thus tymely this tyde?[7]
Madame, for the drecchyng of heven,[8]
Slyke note is newsome to neven,
And it neghes unto mydnight full even.[9]
DOM. Go bitte,[10] boy, I bidde no longer thou byde,
And saie to my sovereyne this same is soth that I send hym.
All naked this nyght as I napped,
With tene and with trayne was I trapped
With a swevene that swiftly me swapped,[11]
Of one Jesu, the juste man the Jewes will undoo;
She prayes[12] tente to that trewe man, with tyne be not trapped,
But als a domes man dewly to be dressand,
And lely delyvere that lede.[13]
FIL. Madame, I am dressid to that dede;
But firste will I nappe in this nede,
For he has mystir of a morne slepe that mydnyght is myssand.[14]

The agony of the Crucifixion is represented with such minute attention to technical detail, as would be likely to raise a vivid conception of physical suffering in the minds of men mostly engaged in manual crafts; and the patient silence of the Saviour is contrasted with rude dialogue like the following:—

O woman! be wise and wary and have your wits about you. There is a gentleman, Jesus, about to be unjustly judged in haste before your husband, and to be injured by scoundrels. If that good man be condemned to death to-day, Sir Pilate and you will be hard put to it: your power will be destroyed, your riches taken from you, and vengeance will fall upon you; and that I dare swear."

[1] Tormented. [2] That makes me dreadfully afraid. [3] Quickly.
[4] Pause for no rest. [5] Hasten. [6] Reverence.
[7] Shall I work at this early hour? [8] By God's passion.
[9] This business is annoying to speak of, and it is now close upon midnight. [10] Away!
[11] As I slept naked this night I was pinched with sorrow and craft by a dream that struck me quickly.
[12] A sudden change to the *oratio obliqua*.
[13] Take heed to that just man; be not snared vexatiously, but be duly prepared to act as a judge, and loyally deliver that man.
[14] He has need of sleep in the morning that has missed it at night.

iii. MILES. Owe, lifte! [*They take up the cross again*]
i. MILES. We loo!
iv. MILES. A litil more.
ii. MIL. Holde thanne!
i. MIL. How nowe!
ii. MIL. The werste is paste.
iii. MIL. He weighs a wikkid weght.
ii. MIL. So may we all foure saie,
Or he was heved on heght,
And raysed in this array.
iv. MIL. He made us stande as any stones,
So boustous[1] was he for to bere.
i. MIL. Now raise hym nemely[2] for the nonys,
And sette hym be this mortas[3] heere;
And latte hym falle in alle at ones,
For certis that payne shall have no pere.[4]
iii. MIL. Heve uppe!
iv. MIL. Latte doune so all his bones
Are a-soundre nowe on sides seere.[5]
i. MIL. This fallyng was more felle
Than all the harms he hadde.[6]
Now may a man wel telle
The leste lith[7] of this ladde.
iii. MIL. Me thynkith this crosse will noght abide,
Ne stande stille in this morteyse yitt.
iv. MIL. Att the firste tyme was it made overe wyde
That makis it wave,[8] thou may wele witte.
i. MIL. Itt schall be sette on ilke a side
So that it schall no forther flitte[9]
Goode wegges[10] schale we take this tyde,
And feste the foote, thanne is all fitte.
i. MIL. Here are wegges arraied
For that, both grete and small.
iii. MIL. Where are our hameres laide,
That we schulde wirke withal?
iv. MIL. We have them here even atte our hands.
ii. MIL. Gyffe me this wegge, I schall it in drive.
iv. MIL. Here is anodir yitt ordande.
iii. MIL. Do take it me hidir belyve.[11]
i. MIL. Laye on thanne faste

---

[1] Huge. [2] Quickly [3] Mortise.
[4] For certainly that pain will be unequalled
[5] Are now racked asunder in every direction.
[6] This jolt was more horrible than all the hurts he had before.
[7] The least joint.—No doubt the word is an error for "[illegible]"
[8] Makes the cross unsteady.
[9] We will put something on each side to prevent it moving more.
[10] Wedges. [11] Give it me here quickly

iii. MIL. Yis, I warrande.
I thryng thame same,[1] so motte I thryve.
Now will this crosse full stabely stande,
All if he rave thei will noght ryve.

The Towneley play shows a spirit of an entirely different kind. In this cycle, which appears to have been composed at a later date than the York Mystery, the symbolical purpose recedes into the background; and the strength of the dramatist is exerted mainly in those episodes in which most scope is given for the imitation of real life. It would indeed almost seem as if the author, in attempting to gratify the taste of his Wakefield audience, had studied the York text, and had deliberately resolved to bring the comic elements of that play into exaggerated relief. The York pageant of the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel introduces a subdued vein of comedy in the person of Brewbarret (Strife-brewer), Cain's servant. This person is apparently introduced in order to exhibit the violent impulses of his master's character, for when he comes on the stage after the death of Abel, Cain, though the other is doing him service, assails him with unmeasured abuse, and then, almost in the same breath, bids him stay and drink with him. In the parallel passage of the Towneley play, we find a "Garcio," named Pyk-harness, but the dramatist has assigned to the character something of the licensed impudence of the slave in the Terentian comedy, and engages him in a dispute with Cain as to the disposal of Abel's body. While the York playwright is content to make Noah's wife abuse her husband for his caution, and bewail the loss of her gossips even when the flood is on the point of sweeping her away, his Wakefield successor actually brings husband and wife to fisticuffs on the stage. The chattering soldiers of the earlier play are, in the Towneley Mystery, transformed into "tormentors," whose brutality and ferocity are represented, if possible, in still more glaring colours. But the most remarkable attempt of the dramatist to enlarge his comic liberties is made in the episode of the Adoration of the Shepherds.

[1] Hammer them together.

Here the York poet, mindful of the didactic aim of the play, shows himself, at the same time, attentive to dramatic propriety, and after introducing his shepherds in the midst of a discussion on the Messianic prophecies, carries them to Bethlehem, when they have seen the vision of angels, on the full tide of rude and pastoral dialogue. But in the Towneley cycle comic instinct has proved too powerful for the taste and perception of the religious playwright. He must needs have a sheep-stealing scene; and accordingly his shepherds are joined in their watch by a certain Mak, who, while his companions sleep, makes off with one of their flock, which he carries home to his wife. Feeling sure that the theft will be discovered, the ingenious pair resolve to dress up the sheep like a new-born baby, and endeavour to elude the search of the shepherds by protesting that the mother and child must not be disturbed. This interlude, which is written with considerable comic humour, is of course entirely out of place.

Equally dramatic, and equally wanting in religious purpose, is the dialogue between Abraham and Isaac in the scene of the Sacrifice. The following passage, strongly contrasting with the spirit of the York play, shows nevertheless with what power the poet had conceived the human side of the situation :—

ABRAHAM. Isaac.
ISAAC. What, sir?
ABRAHAM. Good son, be still.
ISAAC. Fadir!
ABRAHAM. What, son?
ISAAC. Think on thi get,
What have I done?
ABRAHAM. Truly none ille.
ISAAC. And shall I be slayne?
ABRAHAM. So have I het.[1]
ISAAC. Sir, what may helpe?
ABRAHAM. Certis, no skille.
ISAAC. I aske mercy.
ABRAHAM. That may not let.[2]

[1] Promised. [2] Hinder.

ISAAC. When I am deed and closed in claye,
Who shall then be your son?
ABRAHAM. A, Lorde, that I should abide this daye!
ISAAC. Sir, who shall do that I was won?
ABRAHAM. Speak no siche wordes, son, I the pray.
ISAAC. Shall ye me slo?
ABRAHAM. I trow I mon.
Lyg stille, I smytte.
ISAAC. Sir, let me saye.
ABRAHAM. Now, my dere childe, thou may not shon.
ISAAC. The shinyng of youre bright blade
It gars me quake for ferd to die.
ABRAHAM. Therefor groflyng thou shalt be layde,[1]
Then when I stryke thou shalt not se.
ISAAC. What have I done, fadir, what have I sayde?
ABRAHAM. Truly no kyne ille to me.
ISAAC. And thus gyltles shall be arayde?
ABRAHAM. Now, good son, let siche wordes be.
ISAAC. I luf you ay.
ABRAHAM. So do I thee.
ISAAC. Fadir!
ABRAHAM. What, son?
ISAAC. Let now be seyn
For my moder leef.
ABRAHAM. Let be! let be!
It will not help that thou wold meyn;
But lie still till I come to the,
I mys a lytyle thyng I weyn.
He speaks so ruefully to me [*Aside*]
That watir shotes in both min eeyn.
I were lever than all worldly wyn
That I had for hym onys unkynde,
But no defaut I faunde hym in;
I wolde be dede for hym or pynde.
To slo hym thus I thynk grete syn.
So ruefulle wordes I with hym fynd;
I am fulle wo that we shulde twyn,
For he will nevir out of my mynd.
What shall I to his moder say?
For where is he tyle? will she spyr.[2]
If I telle her, run away,
Hir answere bese belife, "Nay, sir!"
And I am ferd her for to flay;
I ne wote what I shall telle hir.
He lygs full stille there as he lay,
For to I come he dare not styr.

[1] Thou shalt be laid on thy face. [2] Where is he gone? she will ask.

Though this representation renders with great force the emotions which in such a situation would naturally agitate father and son, it takes no account of Isaac as a type of Christ, or of Abraham as father of the faithful; and indeed the Angel calls to the latter out of heaven at the very moment when he is most in suspense between the conflicting impulses of obedience to the divine will and human affection

The Coventry cycle exactly reverses the process of the Towneley Mystery. In this play, which was composed probably about the middle of the fifteenth century, the tendency to naturalistic imitation almost entirely disappears. Cain's servant has gone; even Noah's wife has become a respectable and orthodox matron, who impresses upon her husband the necessity of giving their children a sound education:—

I am your wyff, your childeryn these be;
  Onto us tweyn it doth longe
Hem to teche in alle degré
  Synne to forsaken, and werkys wronge.
Therefore, sere, for love of me,
  Enforme hem well evyr amonge,
Synne to forsake and vanyté,
  And vertu to ffolwe that thei ffonge.[1]

The Shepherds of the Adoration are scarcely more rustic in their talk than any other persons of the play. There is, however, one remarkable exception to this prevailing didactic tendency. The pageant of the Trial of Joseph and Mary (founded on the *Protevangelium of St. James*), in which Mary's virginity is tested and approved, is evidently suggested by the procedure of the Consistory Courts, and there is an element of comedy in the dialogue. A summoner opens the trial by calling in, to listen to the accusation, an audience, many of whose names recall the persons of Langland in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*:—

Thom Tynkere, and Betrys Belle,
Peyrs Potter, and Whatt at the Welle,
Symme Smalflyth, and Kate Kelle,
    And Bertylmew the Bochere.

[1] Strive.

Kytt Cakelere, and Colett Crane,
Gyll Fetise, and fayr Jane,
Powle Pewterere, and Pernell Prane,
And Phelypp the good Flecchere.

The case is heard before a bishop, and the charge is preferred by detractors, of whom the chief are Backbiter and Raise-Slander. Mary's innocence is proved by her drinking of a certain cup, and being able afterwards to go round the altar; while her accusers, in their endeavour to satisfy the same test, fail ignominiously. In every other part of the play, however, it is evident that the motive uppermost in the mind of the dramatist is a desire to instruct the people. The scheme of the performance is announced by three *vexillatores*, or banner-bearers, who are careful to inform the spectators of the meaning of each part, and, in one or two of the pageants, an *expositor*, called *Contemplacio*, addresses the audience in verses like the following:—

CONTEMPLACIO. So freynes and frendys, ye mut alle be gret with gode;
Grace, love, and charyté evyr be you among;
The maydenys sone preserve you that for man deyd on rode;
He that is o God in personys thre, defend you fro your fon.

Be the leve and soferauns of allemythty God,
We intendyn to procede the matere that we lefte the last yere,
Wherefore we beseche yow that your wyllys be good
To kepe the passyon in your minde that xal be shewyd here.

The last yere we shewed here how oure Lord, for love of man,
Cam to the city of Jerusalem mekely his deth to take;
And how he made his mawndé, his body givyng than
To his apostelys ever with us to abydyn for man's sake, etc.

It is a curious illustration of the *naïveté* of the whole performance, that Herod, entering the stage after this exhortation, begins his speech by addressing the spectators: "Now sees of your talkyng and gevyth lordly audience." The moral purpose of the dramatist is very strongly marked in the pageant representing the Slaughter of the Innocents, where, while Herod is making his boasts after the massacre, Mors or Death enters, and there is a stage direction, *Hic dum buccinat Mors interficiat Herodem et duos milites subito, et Diabolus*

recipiat eos. Death is not the only abstract character in the play. In the pageant of the Salutation and Conception the first scene is in heaven; the speakers are God the Father, the Virtues, Truth and Righteousness, Mercy and Peace, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit;[1] and after their conference Gabriel is sent to Mary at Nazareth.

From these specimens the reader may form a clear conception of the part played by the Corpus Christi Mysteries in the history of the English drama. Confined within strict limits by their religious origin and symbolical purpose, they nevertheless prepared the way for a larger dramatic development; in the first place, by spreading a taste for theatrical exhibitions among the people; in the second place, by furnishing opportunities, in many of the Scriptural scenes, for the direct imitation of human nature; and in the third place, by importing into the representation foreign materials and characters, which led to the invention of plots beyond the range of Scripture history.

The very gradual steps, by which the secularisation of the drama was effected, are illustrated alike by the structure of the later Miracle Plays, and by the decline of this whole class of play before the growing popularity of the Moralities. A notable feature in the Miracle Plays towards the end of the fifteenth century is the great extension of the comic element. One of the so-called Digby Mysteries,[2] *The Killing of the Children*, for example, is very largely occupied with the feats and speeches of Watkin, Herod's man, a boaster and a coward, who, in one scene, brags to Herod of his exploits, and asks to be dubbed a knight, and, in another, is seized by the bereaved mothers and beaten with their distaffs. *Mary Magdalene*, another play preserved in the same collection, is remarkable for the great number of incidents and persons crowded into it; for the manner in which

[1] [illegible] Compare [illegible]

[2] [illegible] by Mr. F[illegible] [illegible]mprise (1) [illegible] Mary Magdalene, (4) Christ's Burial and Resurrection.

the supernatural machinery of the older Mysteries is utilised in the development of an action mainly turning on human interests; and also for the prominence of its allegorical characters, among whom are Lechery, Mundus, King of the Flesh, The Seven Deadly Sins, Sensuality, etc. The play opens with a boasting speech (in the traditional style always assigned to the parts of kings and governors) of the Emperor Tiberius; and this is followed by another, almost equally vainglorious, from Syrus or Cyrus, father of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, who announces his intention of leaving to Lazarus his lordship of Jerusalem, to Mary the castle of Maudeleyn, and to Martha the lands of Bethany. A scene in the Infernal Regions, resembling episodes of a like nature in the Corpus Christi plays, shows the devil and his ministers contriving the corruption of Mary, which is accomplished by a rather subtle device. Syrus dies, and, while Mary is mourning for her father, she is tempted by seven devils, a process which gives rise to a succession of scenes in a tavern, vividly illustrating the manners of the time. Mary's fall is finally brought about by one Curiosity, a court gallant, whose character is closely imitated from real life. After this the course of the play follows the narrative of Scripture, amplified by the subsequent history of the Magdalene, as related in the *Acta Sanctorum*.

Now it is plain that when a single action, not symbolical like the story of Man's Fall and Redemption exhibited in the Corpus Christi plays, could be made the subject of a plot so intricate and extended as that of *Mary Magdalene*, the drama must have reached a point but a little removed from the representation on the stage of fables of simple secular interest. Curiously enough, the link of connection between the later Miracle Plays and the regular drama is found in a class of plays of which the purpose was symbolical, and in which the actors were all abstractions. These were the Moralities. The dramatist perceived that he might avail himself of the allegorical machinery which had long become an established part of

literary composition. Ever since Guillaume de Lorris had shown the way in the *Romance of the Rose*, the clergy had been anxious to convert the popularity of the new style to their own ends; and poems like Robert Grossetcste's *Château d'Amour*, and homilies like *Sawles Warde* remain as monuments of their ingenuity and invention. Between compositions of this kind and the symbolical play there was an obvious analogy, and, as we have seen, the Coventry playwright was the first to transfer, in a modified form, one of the passages in the *Château d'Amour* into his pageant of *The Salutation and Conception*. This step having been taken, it was easy to extend the principle from a single pageant to an entire play, and to conduct an action, didactic in its purpose like that of the Mysteries, but not taken from Scripture, by means solely of abstract personages.

In making this important transition, the dramatists were careful to conform as closely as possible to the models furnished to them in the Miracle Plays. The oldest surviving Moralities are *The Castle of Perseverance; The Wisdom that is Christ; Mankind; The World and the Child; Everyman;* and *Hick Scorner*. All of these, like the Corpus Christi plays, are variations of a single type. In other words, each of them treats, in its own fashion, of one fundamental idea, namely, the struggle between good and evil in human nature; just as in the Mysteries different dramatists handle variously the story of the Fall and Redemption of Man. Like the Mysteries too, though with somewhat more of variety, the Moralities represent the action of the same persons, Lucifer, Mundus, Anima, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Five Wits, Mankind, etc. The great and essential difference in the constructive principles of the two classes of drama is, that, while the Miracle Play merely exhibits a series of isolated scenes, in illustration of a doctrinal thesis, the Morality works out the purpose of its allegory by means of a continuous plot.

Not only did the authors of the Moralities imitate the Miracle playwrights in the unity of their general conception: they followed them closely in the mechanical

are all abstractions, but they speak and behave like persons in real life. Free-will, Imagination, and Hick-Scorner may be described as three "idle apprentices"; and it is plain that the purpose of the Morality is mainly to amuse the spectators with an account of the misdoings of these rogues. Hick-Scorner gives an account of his travels, and gets Pity put into the stocks, but he himself afterwards appears very little in the play, which is mainly occupied with the conversation of Free-will and Imagination. The conventional type of the Morality, of course, required that the bad character should be reformed; hence Free-will is in the end converted by Perseverance and Contemplation, and himself converts Imagination; but what the audience really enjoyed was no doubt dialogue like the following:—

IMAGINATION. But, Freewill, my dear brother,
Saw you nought of Hick-Scorner?
He promised me to come hither.
FREE-WILL. Why, sir, knowest thou him?
IMAGINATION. Yea, yea, man, he is full nigh of my kin,
And in Newgate we dwelled together,
For he and I were both shackled in a fetter.
FREE-WILL. Sir, lay you beneath or on high of the seller?
IMAGINATION. Nay, iwis among the thickest of yeomen of the collar.
FREE-WILL. By God, then were you in great fear.
IMAGINATION. Sir, had I not been two hundred had been thrust in an halter.
FREE-WILL. And what life have they there all that great sort?
IMAGINATION. By God, sir, once a year some taw halts of Burford;
Yea at Tyburn there standeth the great frame,
And some take a fall that maketh their neck lame.
FREE-WILL. Yea, but can they go no more?
IMAGINATION. Oh no, man; the wrest is twist so sore,
For as soon as they have *In manus tuas* once,
By God, their breath is stopped at once.
FREE-WILL. Why, do they pray in that place there?
IMAGINATION. Yea, sir, they stand in great fear,
And so fast tangled in that snare,
It falleth to their lot to have the same share.
FREE-WILL. That is a knavish sight to see them totter on a beam.
IMAGINATION. Sir, the whoresons could not convey[1] clean.
For, and they could have carried by craft as I can,

[1] Steal.

In process of years each of them should be a gentleman.
Yet as for me I was never thief;
If my hands were smitten off, I can steal with my teeth;
For ye know well there is craft in daubing.
I can look in a man's face and pick his purse,
And can tell new tidings that was never true, i-wis,
For my hood is all lined with lesing.[1]

In the curious enigmatical discourse between these two Abstractions on the subject of hanging, we might almost imagine ourselves to be listening to one of those colloquies between persons of low life in which Shakespeare so much delights.

Here I pause in the history of the English drama. We have seen how in the beginning the miracle play was closely connected with the services of the Church, and was developed by the clergy in order to aid the imagination of the worshipper to realise the mysterious truths of the Christian religion; how from the interior of the church the representation passed to the churchyard, and thence to the open spaces near the towns, thus escaping farther and farther from ecclesiastical control; and how at the great feast of Corpus Christi it finally passed into the hands of the trade-gilds, and became the main vehicle of popular urban amusement. Under the new management it naturally took its colour from the taste of the actors and audience, so that its sacred character was curiously blended with imitations of actual nature and with the comedy of low life. On the other hand, on its symbolical side, it gradually allied itself with literature, and modified its form by admitting the action of allegorical personages. From this modification arose a new kind of play, the Morality, in which a symbolical plot was evolved by the action of a number of abstract characters. The transition from the Morality to the later Interlude, and from this to the regular drama, is a subject that must be deferred till the next volume.

[1] *Hick-Scorner*. Dodsley's *Old Plays* (Hazlitt's edition), vol. i. pp. 157-159.

CHAPTER XI

THE DECAY OF ENGLISH MINSTRELSY

STRICTLY speaking, a history which is mainly intended to trace the development of literary and dramatic poetry in England from the age of Chaucer is not concerned with the history of oral or ballad poetry. But, as the reader will have already seen, Chaucer's art has its roots in the oral poetry of the trouvères and troubadours; and the ballad made so frequent an appearance in the English drama, and so powerfully influenced the course of metrical composition at the close of the eighteenth century, that the subject is one that cannot be neglected at the point of the narrative to which we have now been brought. In order, therefore, to give a comprehensive view of the relations between English Poetry and English Minstrelsy, and of the m[illegible]er in which each form of art has been affected by t[illegible]r, I propose in this chapter to deal

successors of the ancient bards,"—in which term Percy evidently intended to include the oral poets of all the ancient nations, Celtic, Teutonic, and Scandinavian.

3. "The minstrels" (*i.e.* the Anglo-Saxon minstrels) "continued a distinct order of men for many ages after the Norman Conquest. . . . I have no doubt," says Percy, "but most of the old heroic ballads in this collection were composed by this order of men"

4. "The reader will find that the minstrels continued down to the reign of Elizabeth, in whose time they had lost much of their dignity, and were sinking into contempt and neglect. Yet still they sustained a character far superior to anything we can conceive at present of the singers of old ballads."

As regards the origin of the Romances, Percy's theory is substantially contained in the following passage:—

"As the irruption of the Normans into France under Rollo did not take place till towards the beginning of the tenth century, at which time the scaldic art was arrived to the highest pitch in Rollo's native country, *we can easily trace the descent of the French and English Romances of Chivalry from the Northern sagas.* The Conqueror doubtless carried many scalds with him from the North, who transmitted their skill to their children and successors. These adopting the religion, opinions, and language of the *new country, substituted the heroes of Christendom instead* of those of their pagan ancestors, and began to celebrate the feats of Charlemagne, Roland, and Oliver; whose true history they set off and embellished with the scaldic figments of dwarfs, giants, dragons, and enchantments. . . . But this is not all; it is very certain that both the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks had brought with them, at their first emigrations into Britain and Gaul, the same fondness for the ancient songs of their ancestors which prevailed among the other Gothic tribes, and that all their first annals were transmitted in these popular poems. This fondness they even retained long after their conversion to Christianity, as we learn from the examples of Charlemagne and Alfred. Now, poetry being thus the transmitter of

facts, would as easily learn to blend them with fictions, as she is known to have done in the north, and that much sooner for the reasons before assigned. This, together with the example and influence of the Normans, will easily account to us why the first Romances of Chivalry that appeared both in England and France were composed in metre, as a rude kind of epic songs. In both kingdoms tales in verse were usually sung by minstrels to the harp on festal occasions; and doubtless both nations derived their relish for this sort of entertainment from their Teutonic ancestors, without either of them borrowing it from the other. Among both peoples narrative songs on true or fictitious subjects had evidently obtained from the earliest times. But the professed Romances of Chivalry seem to have been first composed in France where also they had their name."

Percy was a critic of admirable poetical taste and literary skill, but he was not altogether proof against the temptations to which these qualities exposed him. In the collection of ballads which he "edited" from the MS. in his possession, he did not scruple to alter and supplement the original text whenever he thought that by so doing he could improve the general effect. By these practices he roused the wrath of an able and relentless antagonist. Joseph Ritson (born in 1752) possessed all the enthusiasm, and even more than the share of eccentricity, which so often accompanies the genius of the antiquary. A vegetarian on principle, he probably impaired by the strictness with which he carried his faith into practice a constitution which needed to be sustained on a different kind of diet. He adopted, as will presently be seen, a form of orthography peculiar to himself. Violent in all his notions,—religious, moral, and political, as well as critical,—he was always ready to fall upon others whose opinions were at variance with truth, or at least with his own view of it. As his learning was large and generally accurate, and his style incisive, he was respected and disliked; and at different times Warburton, Johnson, Warton, and Steevens all felt the edge of his criticism.

It will readily be supposed that Percy's ideas of the duties of an editor did not commend themselves to Ritson, who, in the Preface to his own *Select Collection of English Songs*, published in 1783, alluded to the Bishop's practices in his usual trenchant fashion:—

"Forgery and imposition of every kind ought to be universally execrated, and never more than when they are employed by persons high in rank and character."

In 1802 Ritson published his *Ancient English Metrical Romances*, and renewed his attacks on Percy and Warton (whose *History of English Poetry* he had previously criticised) in a dissertation, the following extracts from which may provide the reader with some entertainment, and may explain, at the same time, why the strictures of a man so learned as Ritson should have had so little effect on the development of the question we are considering. Of his own book Ritson says:—

"Brought to an end with much industry and more attention, in a continued state of ill-health, and low spirits, the editour abandons it to general censure, with cold indifference, expecting little favour and less profit; but certain at any rate to be insulted by the malignant and calumnious personalitys of a base and prostitute gang of lurking assassins, who stab in the dark and whose poison'd daggers he has allready experienc'd."[1]

Speaking of an opinion of the historian of English Poetry, he says:—

"In consequence" (the Saxons being an illiterate people) "no romance has yet been discover'd in Saxon, but a prose translation allready notice'd. So that if, as Warton pretends, the flourishing of 'the tales of the Scandinavian scalds' among the Saxons may be justly prèsume'd, it is certain they had been soon lost, as neither vestige nor notice is preserve'd of them in any ancient writeèr, nor in fact would any but a stupid fool, or rank impostor, imagine that any of these supposititious Scandinavian tales existed in the middle of the fifth century when the Saxons first establish'd themselves in Britain."[2]

[1] *Ancient English Metrical Romances*, p. iv. [2] *Ibid.* p. lxxxii.

Ritson having shown in his volume of 1783 that Percy's citations of ancient ballads were not to be relied on, the Bishop, in a new edition of the *Reliques*, professed himself ready to follow any authoritative text, but pretended that Ritson's own text was not trustworthy because, in a single instance, it did not correspond with the MS. Under the circumstances he describes in the following passage, Ritson had some right to be angry; but his manner of venting his indignation was only too characteristic:—

"The Bishop of Dromore (as he now is) on a former occasion haveing himself, as he wel knows, allready falsify'd and corrupted a modern Scottish song, says . . . This, however, is an INFAMOUS LYE; it being much more likely that he himself, who has practise'd every kind of forgery and imposture, had some such end to alter this particular line, with much more violence, and as he himself owns actual 'CORRUPTION,' to give the quotation an air of antiquity, which it was not entitled. The present editour's text is perfectly accurate to a single comma, but 'this line,' as he pretends to apologise for his own, 'being quoted from memory,' haveing frequently heard it so sung in his younger days by a north country blacksmith, without thinking it necessary for the moment to turn to the genuine text, which lay at his elbow, and which his lordship DARE NOT IMPEACH. 'Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see [more] clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.' Gospel according to S. Matthew, chap. vii. verse 5."[1]

In his own dissertation on the Romances, Ritson admitted the accuracy of Percy's account of the decay of minstrelsy, but denied the correctness of the Bishop's theory as to the origin and development of the art, and he supported his conclusions with great strength of argument and learning. The reading public, however, while much excited by the specimens of ancient poetry which Percy had been the first to reveal to them,

[1] Ritson, *Ancient English Minstrelsy*, p. cxliii.

were only moderately interested in the antiquities connected with the subject, and were therefore surprised at the heat with which the controversy was maintained. Scott, in an article on "Romance," contributed to the Supplement to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, expressed the sum of general opinion on the matter:—"There is so little room for this extreme loss of temper, that upon a recent perusal of both these ingenious essays, we were surprised to find that the reverend editor of the *Reliques* and the accurate antiquary have differed so very little as in essential facts they appear to have done."

Since the beginning of the century numerous collateral points, all more or less connected with the main question raised by Percy,—such as the age of the Icelandic sagas, the age and character of the *Song of Beowulf* and the *Nibelungenlied*, and the sources of ballad poetry,—have engaged the attention of scholars and critics. Philology, comparative mythology, and archæology, have all been employed with great learning and ingenuity to illuminate each specific matter of debate. But the question of greatest interest to the general reader and the literary critic—viz. the true history of the march and movement of poetry—has remained very much in the position in which it was left by Percy, who, secure in the general favour with which his book was received, made no attempt to modify his theory at any of the points against which Ritson had directed his attack. Something has been already said, in the earlier chapters of this history, of the growth of mediæval poetry, but at this stage it will be convenient to consider more fully the changes in the art of minstrelsy, as illustrated (I) by the progress of society from the tribal to the civil state, (II) by the transition from oral to written poetry, (III) by the character of the ballad.

(I) In the early stages of society, before the invention of writing, the art of metrical composition is the only way in which mankind can preserve the memory of things. The bard or minstrel is therefore at once the genealogist, the historian, the theologian of the tribe. He may also in a sense be described as its philosopher, and the songs

amusement and interest which before were unknown to them. Under these influences the simple character of the Northern minstrel soon expanded itself, leaving the course of its transformation plainly visible on the surface of language. It was the office of the Teutonic "gleeman" at once to celebrate the great actions of his lord and to amuse his leisure; and it is therefore not surprising to find his name at first translated into Latin as "joculator," and afterwards corrupted into French as "jogleur"; nor to hear of a "jogleur" of the Lombards prophesying victory to Charlemagne on his march into Italy.[1] But our ordinary associations are certainly shocked when we read of martial songs of the same kind being sung by a *scurra* or buffoon;[2] for this can only mean that the gleeman while continuing to sing the ancient tribal "gestes" has begun to amuse his lord by an exhibition of the same kind of tricks as diverted the rich and corrupted Roman. In the same manner the "gestour," or singer of heroic songs, gradually declines into the jester or court fool. Besides, the barbarians found among the Romans a long-established form of amusement provided by the "mimus," who entertained his audience by dumb action. As no word is more frequently used than this by the Latin writers of the Middle Ages to denote the minstrel class, we may infer that the arts of the mime were imitated by some of the gleemen. This would have naturally led to a separation between the offices of the singer and the harper, hitherto combined in the single person of the Teutonic minstrel; hence in the laws of James II., king of Majorca, provision is made for the engagement in the service of the palace of five mimes, of whom two are to be trumpeters, and a third a tabourer.[3] In course of time the art of minstrelsy came to include all the other instruments which the barbarians found in use among the nations with whom

[1] "Contigit joculatorem ex Longobardorum gente ad Carolum venire, et cantiunculam a se compositam de eadem re, rotando in conspectu suorum, cantare."—Muratori, *Antiquitates Italicæ*, ii. 845.

[2] "Tanta vero illius securitas . . . ut *scurram* se præcedere facerent qui musico instrumento res fortiter gestas et priorum bella præcineret."—Aimoinus, *De Miraculis S. Benedicti*, c. 37, cited by Du Cange under *Ministelli*.

[3] Du Cange, under *Mimus*.

they were brought into contact, those most frequently mentioned being the viol, the clavichord, the rote, and the psaltery.[1] Besides the accomplishment of singing and playing, the professional minstrel, descending from his dignity to meet the growing wants of his patrons, added to his stock of entertainments dancing and even tumbling, in which female as well as male performers displayed their skill;[2] nor did he disdain tricks of magic and sleight of hand. Taillefer at the battle of Hastings appears to have exhibited his dexterity as a "tregetour" (*trajector*), while he animated the courage of the Normans by his heroic chants;[3] and, in the feats of the juggler of the London streets, may be found a lingering tradition of a craft (*jogleur*) which was not without honour in the days of chivalry.

Thus the simple art of the harping minstrel was broken up, by the advance of the Teutonic tribes to a more civil condition of society, into a number of separate branches. These again gradually decayed, or were absorbed into higher forms of art, as tribes grew into nations, and each nation invented fresh methods of luxury and refinement. The more venerable theological and didactic functions of the bard naturally disappeared under the influence of Christianity; and this was especially the case among the Anglo-Saxons. Minstrelsy, in the latter days of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty, when the tide of monastic revival ran strongly, was regarded with much

[1] Wace's enumeration (in his *Brut*) of the different kinds of minstrelsy employed in Arthur's court shows how great was the variety of musical entertainment in the Middle Ages:—

> Mult ost a la cort jogleurs,
> Chanteors, estrumantéors,
> Mult poissez oir chançons,
> Rotuenges et voialx sons,
> Vileors, lais, et notez,
> Laiz de violes, laiz de rotez,
> Laiz de harpez, laiz de fretiax,
> Lires, tympres, et chalemealz,
> Symphoniez, psalterions,
> Monacors, des cymbes, chorons,
> Assez i ot tregeteors,
> Joieresses et joieors,
> Li uns dient contes et fables.

[2] Percy, *Essay on the Ancient Minstrels*, Note A; and Ritson, *Ancient English Metrical Romances* (1802), vol. i. p. cxciii.

[3] Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, vol. iii. p. 478, Note 4.

disfavour by the Church, as diverting the thoughts of the people into mundane channels. King Edgar, in one of his canons, published in 960, enjoined that no priest should be an ale-drinker, nor in any wise a minstrel (ʒliwige, *scurra*); and in his oration to Dunstan he expressed his grief that the houses of clerks were become a *conciliabulum* of minstrels.[1] Independently, therefore, of the great change in the manners of the Anglo-Saxons, which brought about the decline in their native poetry, described in an earlier chapter, the influence of monasticism tended in the same direction; and, as we have already seen, the genius of Puritanism, the natural antagonist of the arts of minstrelsy, gives no uncertain sound in the poems of men like Robert of Brunne, the author of the *Cursor Mundi*, and Langland himself. Percy's assertion that the Anglo-Saxon minstrels "continued a distinct order of men for many ages after the Norman Conquest" is not supported by any evidence. If minstrelsy took fresh root and flourished in England after the battle of Hastings, it was owing to the tastes and habits of the Norman conquerors.

Even among these, however, the progress of civil refinement tended to discourage the practice of oral poetry. The number of readers in court and castle increased so much as to provide occupation for the class of scrivener; and greater finish was required in metrical compositions, intended for private study, than could be found in the often improvised songs of the minstrel. When printing was invented, the multiplication of books brought to hundreds of individuals sources of amusement which they could previously only have shared as members of a collective audience. As to the pleasure derived from gesture and mimicry, the growth of dramatic exhibitions, by means of pageants and Miracle Plays, and the composition of plays requiring the co-operation of many actors, drew off a large number of the mimetic minstrels into a separate profession. There was accordingly a constant tendency, as far as the minstrel's art depended on recitation,

[1] Ritson, *Ancient English Metrical Romances* (1802), vol. i. p. clxxi.

for the singer to seek support from audiences of inferior taste and education; and as far as it depended on instrumental melody, for the musician to supersede the poet. In the former capacity the social status of the minstrel progressively declined, until, in a statute passed in the thirty-ninth year of Elizabeth, he is found to be classed with rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars, and with such is adjudged to be punished.[1] In his latter capacity, on the other hand, he retained something of the rank and privileges he had enjoyed from the earliest times, and his order came to hold a recognised office as court musicians. In the reign of Henry III. the king's harper received a salary of forty shillings and a pipe of wine. Under Edward II. the minstrels claimed privileges which required to be defined by express regulation. In the reign of Henry V. the number of the king's minstrels is recorded, and orders are given for their allowance. A commission was issued under Henry VI. to impress boys as minstrels for the king's service; while under Henry VII. and Henry VIII. ample provision was made for the maintenance of these royal musicians.[2] As late as the reign of George II. traces of the musical element in minstrelsy still survive, in the body of musicians employed about the court under the name of Children of the King's Chapel.[3] From all this it is plain that, though Percy was justified in maintaining that the minstrels were the successors of the ancient bards, this rough statement can only be accepted with very precise qualifications; and that, when he further declares it to be beyond doubt that "most of the old heroic ballads in his collection were composed by this order of men," we ought, in judging of the poetical merit of the ballads, to take into account the very various degrees of taste and refinement in the audience, on whose pleasure the minstrels depended at each successive stage of their history.

(II) The first stage which demands our attention in the

[1] Percy's *Reliques*, "Essay on the Ancient Minstrels."

[2] For the above particulars see Percy's "Essay" referred to in note 1.

[3] There were twenty-four of them. See *Dunciad*, book i. 319, and note (*Pope's Works*, vol. iv. p. 124, Elwin and Courthope's edition).

transition of Teutonic minstrelsy from its early oral period to the age of the "heroic ballads" spoken of by Percy, is the Metrical Romance. Percy's account of the origin of the chivalrous romance is plainly erroneous. He seems to have imagined that the romance was a direct development of the Norse saga, though the particular tales on which he founded his inference were undoubtedly posterior in date to the French romances. Even supposing, however, that Norse sagas were in existence, which might have served as literary models for the metrical romances, it is quite unnecessary to trace the latter class of poem to that source; for it is certain that the Franks, as well as the Northmen, had their minstrels, and these, in the ordinary course of things, no doubt adapted the oral traditions of their art to the requirements of the language, which grew out of their commerce with the conquered races of Gaul. The process must have been extremely gradual; but one of the *fabliaux* preserved by Legrand d'Aussy enables us to form a fairly clear conception of the lines of development.

"Two troops of minstrels," says he, "meet in a castle, and attempt, according to the custom of the times, to amuse the lord by a quarrel. One of them separates himself from his troop; he begins to insult a minstrel of the other company; and after having reproached him with having a mere beggar's dress, and being an ignoramus, who will never have merit enough to get a new coat, and other compliments of the same kind, he boasts of being a better man, and exhibits all his talents in succession. He can *tell* tales, he says, in *Romance* (French) *and Latin;* he knows more than forty *lays* and *chansons de geste*, and all the songs that he could be possibly asked for. He knows also the *Romances of adventure*, and in particular those of the Round Table. Finally, he knows how to *sing* many romances, such as *Vivien*, *Renaud le Danois*, etc., and how to *tell* others, such as *Flore et Blanchefleur*."[1]

Now, at the date supposed in this *fabliau*, it is evident

[1] Translated from Legrand d'Aussy, *Fabliaux*, vol. ii. p. 371 (edition 1829).

that the art of minstrelsy had branched into a number of separate channels. We see distinctions very clearly drawn between (1) tales which are *sung* and tales which are *told* or recited; (2) orders of tales, the *chanson de geste* being distinguished from the lay and the romance of adventure; (3) tales told (and doubtless written) in Latin and tales told in French. If we take the *Song of Beowulf* as the normal type of tale prevailing while the art of poetry was in its oral stage among the Teutonic races, we can imagine the manner in which these varieties of composition would have gradually come into existence. *Beowulf* is mythological, genealogical, and to some extent historical, and it contains a narrative of heroic adventure; but it shows no traces of the element of love, and very few of the element of magic or marvel, which together constitute the essential character of romance, as the word is generally understood. In this respect there is little difference between the Anglo-Saxon poem and the early *chansons de geste*, such as the *Chant de Roland* or the *Quatre Fils Aymon*; and these songs may therefore be regarded as types of the earliest compositions of the minstrels in the newly formed Romance languages.

The type was soon modified by contact with Latin literature. In his capacity of historian, the minstrel began to adapt his metrical narrative to such models as were presented to him in the prose chronicles of Geoffrey of Monmouth; and as this new form of history was reduced to writing in the vulgar tongue, it received the name of *Roman*, to distinguish it from histories composed in Latin. Hence Wace's historical poems are called *Roman de Rou* and *Roman de Brut*. Wace, as we have seen, writes in a spirit quite opposed to that of the mythological historians, who recorded the deeds of their heroes in the traditional forms of song; and his style is equally remote from that of the makers of the fully developed romance, who rely on the frequent introduction of the elements of love and adventure.

A further modification of the old *chanson de geste* was effected by the assimilation of forms of oral poetry in use

among the Celtic races in the North of France. Marie of France, an Anglo-Norman poetess, was the first to imitate the Breton lay in the Romance tongue; but it is impossible now to discover how much of the matter of her lays is drawn immediately from Celtic sources. It is plain that her poems reflect the state of contemporary feudal society, and that her reference to the Breton MSS., on which she professes to base her story, is therefore, in all probability, one of the fictions common among the poets of her epoch. It is indeed reasonable to suppose that she and other Anglo-Norman poets found in existence, and employed for their own poetical purposes, legends and superstitions common to the Celtic race, and handed down from a remote antiquity. The names of the different knights of the Round Table suggest at once a Celtic origin, and we may conclude that they were each associated with some kind of tradition which would have afforded a groundwork for the fictitious development of their characters. The conception of the Round Table itself would naturally have arisen out of institutions peculiar to the Celtic peoples.[1] The many magical transformations, enchantments, and apparitions of fairies in the Lays of Marie and the Romances of the Round Table may also be reasonably ascribed to the fertility of Celtic superstition. But to go beyond this and to assert that the Arthurian legend, in its existing form, is, at least in outline, a relic of ancient mythology, is to advance a proposition which can hardly be sustained by argument. No support to the theory is furnished by the Tales of the *Mabinogion*, of which there is no MS. older than the fourteenth century, and which are more likely to be the offspring than the parents of the French Romances. Nor do the latter in the least resemble what remains of ancient Welsh minstrelsy. "The most remarkable result," says a very high authority, "of the examination of the earliest literature of the Welsh people, whatever date may be assigned to it, is that in these the older preserved

[1] Athenæus, describing Celtic banquets, says (*Deipnosophistæ*, iv. 32), "When many of them dine together they sit in a circle, and the chief sits in the centre like the leader of the chorus, being distinguished above the rest either by his valour in war, or his birth, or by his wealth."

specimens of Welsh poetry, there is, with the exception of *Taliesin*, a total absence of anything like a tale, or the recital of an adventure, or even of a love story. There is not, as far as I am aware, one single poem or ballad, founded upon an incident or adventure, or which can be said to have a hero or heroine, if we except those descriptive of actual combats, or written in praise of historical persons."[1] The Romances of the Round Table are, indeed, full of touches reflecting the custom and folk-lore of the time, but there is nothing to show that these do not rather proceed from the invention of poets of Scandinavian or Teutonic descent, than from the indigenous traditions of Celtic minstrelsy.[2]

One thing at least is unquestionable in the literary composition of the fully developed Romances of the Round Table: the main factor is the invention of the Anglo-Norman trouvère, fresh, vigorous, flexible, and accustomed to mould at will the materials with which it deals. The matter for the adventurous story

[1] *Taliesin*, by D. W. Nash, p. 322.

[2] Sir G. W. Cox (*Mythology of the Aryan Nations*, p. 281) maintains [illegible]

the story of Rolf and Ingegerd, of Tristram and Iseult, and he rightly insists that 'these mythical deep-rooted germs, throwing out fresh shoots from age to age in the popular history of the race, are far more convincing proofs of the early existence of their traditions than any mere external evidence' (*Norse Tales*, Introduction, cxlii.)." I confess that this reasoning leaves me quite unconvinced. The story of the naked sword between the sleepers is, on the face of it, a poetic invention, and unless it can be shown, as it certainly cannot, that it is derived from a remote antiquity, it is less probable that such an idea should have occurred quite independently to different poets in different nations, [illegible]

says ingenuously: "It is certainly worth noting that the incident is related also [illegible]

pp. 455-468.

is supplied partly by the written History of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and partly by the legends preserved in the lays of the Breton bards, the whole being clothed with an imaginative atmosphere of magic and superstition derived from the folk-lore of the Teutonic and, still more, the Celtic races. The result is seen in romances like *Merlin*, *Lancelot*, and the *Mort d'Arthure*. Another element is added by the imagination of the cloister, nourished on the lives of the saints and the apocryphal Gospels, which, with a colouring of vague, Oriental mysticism, produces such romances of adventure as the *Story of the Graal*.

The form of the romance, considered apart from its matter, is due to the invention of a succession of poets, each travelling farther than his predecessor from the primitive type of heroic minstrelsy.

Benoît de Ste. More in the middle of the twelfth century gave new character to the *chanson de geste* by introducing materials not connected with the genealogical traditions of the Northmen. He applied the style of minstrelsy to the story of the Trojan War as told by the false Dictys and Dares, and the naïve fidelity, with which he rendered into his own language the minute details recorded by those ingenious literary forgers, produced a quaint effect which at once made his poem extremely popular. He also prepared the way for the introduction of love episodes into the *roman*, by his narrative of Briseis' fickle behaviour to Troilus; though he himself seems to have simply regarded the incident from a semi-monastic point of view, as illustrating the character of women.

A far greater stride of invention was made by Chrestien de Troyes, who composed somewhat later in the twelfth century than Benoît de Ste. More. In some of his tales the "gests" of one or more heroic warriors were replaced by the moving adventures of a pair of faithful lovers, or of a husband and wife, who, after being separated from each other by a succession of misfortunes, varied by incidents of magic and marvel, are, as a rule, brought into a state of happiness and prosperity at the close

of the story.[1] It will be generally recognised that this is a faithful description of the Greek novel, so that, even if positive evidence were wanting, there would be a fair presumption as to the quarter in which Chrestien looked for his models. The presumption becomes a certainty, when we find that one of the leading episodes in his *Roman de Cliget*—viz. the burial of the heroine, while still alive, in a tomb after the manner of Juliet—is taken directly from the *Habrocomas and Anthia* of Xenophon.[2] Chrestien de Troyes was a retainer of Philip, Count of Flanders, who fell at the siege of Acre in 1191, and it is reasonable to suppose that his attention was drawn to the Greek novels while attending his lord to the Crusades. The fruits of his study of them are seen in his surviving poems, *Enid and Eric*, *Ywain and Gawain* or the *Chevalier au Lion*, the *Roman de Cliget*, and *Guillaume d'Angleterre*. Besides these tales, we know that he was the author of the metrical *Romance of Tristan*, which, in its original form, is unfortunately lost, but which, in all probability, furnished the materials for the famous prose romance relating the adventures of that knight. More than one incident in the romance as it has come down to us resemble episodes in the *Clitophon and Leucippe* of Achilles Tatius.[3]

When Chrestien, who professed his faithful adherence to historical authority, had struck out his new path his example was speedily followed, and his disciples approached still closer to the lines of the Greek novel by composing the cycle of romances on the Round Table in prose. There is, in fact, no more fundamental difference between these two types of romance than we should naturally expect to find between works produced in the decadence of civili-

[1] This is particularly the case in *Guillaume d'Angleterre*. See the analysis of that poem in *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, vol. xv (edition of 1869), pp. 221-235.

[2] Compare *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, vol. xv pp. 213-219, with Xenophon, *Ephesiacorum* lib. iii. 5-10.

[3] [illegible]

sation, and works of the same order, composed when the spirit of chivalry was in the fulness of its vigour. The romance writer of the Middle Ages diligently followed the Greek novelist in his attempts to produce a variety of adventures; in his invention of devices, magical or natural, for extricating his actors from dangerous situations; in the general method of managing his plots, such as the use of "recognition" (ἀναγνώρισις) and "reversal of fortune" (περιπέτεια); in his analysis of the moods of love; but, rightly adhering to the historic character of the earlier *romans*, he substituted hardy and courageous knights for the effete citizens who figure as heroes in the Greek novel.

As time passed on even these external differences tended to disappear. The romances of Arthur and Charlemagne preserved at least the semblance of an historic foundation, and it would seem to be probable that Chrestien took the names of his heroes and heroines, and perhaps derived some of his materials, from legendary Celtic sources. But in the later romances, represented by *Amadis of Gaul* and his numerous progeny, a new character makes its appearance. These stories are invariably written in prose, and show no signs of having sprung from an earlier metrical version. Everything in them betrays the hand of a deliberate inventor, who ransacks literature to obtain materials. The features of the older class of romance are stereotyped and magnified. The hero becomes a person of ideal perfection, such as Amadis of Gaul, Palmerin of England, Lisuarte of Greece, who reflects lustre on the nation of his birth, although his name may not occur in history. His adventures are very largely with giants. Magic is made to play a more important part in the machinery of the story, than is the case in the romances of the Round Table; and, generally speaking, the author pays great attention to the development of character and the elaboration of the plot. In proportion as he is driven to depend more on his own invention, and reflects less of the life and manners of an all-pervading and poetic chivalry, his style and sentiment continue to degenerate: hence Cervantes makes a just distinction between the earlier and later works

of this class, and excepts *Amadis de Gaul* from the sentence he passes on his offspring, of whom he declares "that the excellence of the father should not avail the son, but that he should be thrown into the court to give a beginning to the bonfire."[1] A practical test of the quality of these late literary romances is furnished by the neglect with which they were treated by the ballad-makers who borrowed so freely from the older legends of Arthur and Charlemagne.

(III) In considering the origin and development of ballad poetry in England, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the nature of this kind of composition. A vague idea prevails that, as the ballad is before all things popular in its character, it was evolved in some mysterious manner out of the genius and traditions of the people themselves. But this was by no means the case. What the people contributed to the making of the ballads was no more than the taste and sentiment which characterise them. They preserved them, it is true, in their memories after they had been composed, but the matter not less than the form of the poem was, as a rule, furnished exclusively by the minstrel, who adapted the ancient traditions of an art, originally intended to please the tribal chieftain or the feudal lord, to the temper of a popular audience. Now as the oldest of the English ballads does not date back farther than the middle of the fourteenth century, at which period the taste of the upper classes of society was occupied either with the prose romances, or with allegorical and other purely literary forms of poetry, while the lower classes, who chiefly cared for minstrelsy, had long been accustomed to the forms of settled government, it is reasonable to expect that, though the wandering gleeman would still preserve the outlines of the primitive art, his handling of the theme would be somewhat degenerate. And this is precisely what we find. The English ballads that have come down to us fall naturally into three classes: those which reflect the characteristics of the ancient *chanson de geste;* those which combine

[1] *Don Quixote*, bk. i. ch. 6.

the features of the *chanson de geste* and the literary romance; and those which have a purely literary origin in the romance, lay, or *fabliau*. To the first class belong ballads like the *Battle of Otterburn* and the *Hunting of the Cheviot;* to the second the cycle of the Robin Hood ballads; to the third ballads like *Sir Aldingar*, *Sir Cauline*, *Earl Brand*, *Child Waters*, and the like. In all of these, the sentiments, the form, the language of the composition, show plain traces of decline from a more ancient and noble model.

If, for example, the *Battle of Otterburn* and the *Hunting of the Cheviot* be compared with the Anglo-Saxon chant of the *Death of Byrhtnoth*, it will at once be seen that the two sets of poems have many points in common. Both recite in song the incidents of a battle; both record the deeds and the speeches of the leaders; both enumerate the names of the slain. There is, moreover, in the *Hunting of the Cheviot* a most interesting example of the long survival of the spirit of the "comitatus," which deserves comparison with the passages of the same kind already cited from the *Death of Byrhtnoth* and from *Beowulf*. I refer to the speech of Witherington. When Percy and Douglas propose to settle the quarrel by single combat,—

> Then bespake a squyre of Northumberland,
> Ric Wytharynton was his name;
> It shall never be tolde in South-Ynglonde, he says,
> To King Harry the fourth for shame.
>
> I wot you bin great lordës twaw,
> I am a poor squyar of land;
> I will never see my captain fight on a field,
> And stand my-self and look on,
> But while I may my weapon wield,
> I will not fail both heart and hand.[1]

But, when we look more closely into the spirit which

[1] It will be convenient to say, once for all, that the extracts of ballads, made now and hereafter, are taken from the splendid collection of Professor Child, to whose unwearied industry I am also mainly indebted for the materials on which I have founded my reasoning as to the nature of the ballad though he is in no way responsible for my inferences from the facts. I have slightly modernised the spelling in this extract.

respectively marks these compositions, a wide difference becomes at once visible. The scôp who made the *Battle of Maldon* still sings as a genealogist and historian. He is aware of the exact circumstances under which the battle was fought; he preserves the names of the fathers of the combatants; he breathes into the speeches of his heroes a lofty spirit of patriotism. But neither in the *Battle of Otterburn* nor *Chevy Chase* is there any regard for historical truth. Froissart has left us an account of the incidents that actually led to the fight. We know that, in 1388, the Scots mustered a large force for the invasion of England, and that the Earl of Northumberland, not having power enough to resist them, endeavoured to check their advance by threatening a counter-raid into Scotland; that the Scots, hearing of this plan, divided their army into two parts, of which the smaller, numbering 3000, under James Douglas, marched as far south as Durham, burning and ravaging the country, and then retired with much booty by way of Newcastle to Otterburn. Here they were followed and attacked by Harry Percy with nearly 9000 men, but though Douglas was killed, the victory remained with the Scots, and Percy was taken prisoner. The minstrel who composed the *Battle of Otterburn* exactly reverses the truth. He makes Percy attack 44,000 Scots (which was indeed about the number of the main body) with 9000 English, and he gives the victory to the latter, pretending that only eighteen of the Scots remained alive after the battle to five hundred of their antagonists. He represents Percy killing Douglas in single combat, though the latter was actually killed in a *mêlée*; and though he incidentally mentions at the close of the poem that "the Percy was led away," his narrative of the course of the battle is inconsistent with such an ending.

The *Hunting of the Cheviot* shows still greater boldness in handling facts. The minstrel who composed it imagines the cause of the battle to have been a chivalrous poaching expedition made by Percy into Scotland, of which the latter seems to have sent notice to Douglas: the fight,

he says, is generally called the battle of Otterburn, but he fancies that this place is in the Cheviot district: he kills Percy as well as Douglas: he supposes the battle of Homildon Hill in 1401, where Percy was actually in command, to have been fought by King Henry IV., in revenge for Percy's death at Otterburn; and he brings tidings of Douglas's death to "King James" at Edinburgh, although James I. did not begin to reign till 1424.

From the character of these two ballads we may infer with some confidence the motives which inspired their production, and the class of audience to which they were addressed. Both must have been composed long after the date of the battle.[1] Neither can have been intended, in the first place, for the ears of the nobility and gentry, who would scarcely have tolerated the liberties which the minstrels took in dealing with family facts within their own knowledge; on the other hand, both narratives are well calculated to gratify the national pride of the English peasantry, by their record of a stubborn and even fight, which had deeply stirred the imagination of the whole Border-side. The composer of the *Battle of Otterburn*, who had consulted the Chronicles, actually claims credit for his historical accuracy, though he must have known that he was guilty of a flagrant *suppressio veri:*[2] the author of *Chevy Chase* seems to be satisfied with giving a poetical version of the facts as he has received them on the authority of "the oldest inhabitant."[3] Neither the one minstrel nor the other shows any of that sense of responsibility, as a poetical chronicler of recent events, which marks the *Battle of Maldon* or the *Roman de Rou*.

[1] Bishop Percy very justly points out that the *Battle of Otterburn*, the older of the two, cannot have been in existence before 1449, for that was the date of the creation of the earldom of Huntly, who is mentioned among the Scottish leaders.

[2] But nyne thowzand, ther was no moo,
The cronykle wyll not layne [lie];
Forty thowsande of Skottes and fowre
That day fowght them agayne.

[3] This was the hontynge off the Cheviot,
That tear begane this spurn;
Old men that knowen the grownde well yenoughe
Call it the battel of Otterburn.

In judging the poetical sentiment of these songs, we have to take into account that *Chevy Chase* has come down to us, surrounded with all the prestige derived from the praise bestowed on it by Sir Philip Sidney and Addison.[1] Nor is it to be denied that the poetical qualities of the ballad, pointed out with so much judgment by the latter, fully deserve his tribute of commendation. At the same time, it is to be remembered that each of these critics is regarding the ballad from a peculiar point of view; looking back, one in the half-regretful spirit of the knight, the other in the appreciative temper of the man of taste, on the lofty sentiment of those ruder stages of society which they have left behind. When the comparison is made with such earlier productions as the *Song of Beowulf* or the *Death of Byrhtnoth*, we perceive that the *Battle of Otterburn*, and *Chevy Chase*, while vividly reflecting the temper of the audiences for which they are composed, show also how far the Muse of Minstrelsy has declined, with the Genius of Feudalism, from her old-world inspiration. They express the feelings of that portion of the people which, settled on the borders of two rival kingdoms, preserve many of the habits of tribal plunder and private war, long checked at the more civilised centre. The flashes of chivalrous feeling in them are swift, abrupt, brilliant, and display the fantastic exaggeration which belongs to the age of Froissart and his immediate successors. Their character is stamped on such passages as that in which Percy, when besieged in Newcastle, makes a present to Douglas:—

> A pipe of wine he gave them over the walls,
> For sooth as I you say;
> Then he made the Douglas drink,
> And all his host that day;

---

[1] "Certainly I must confesse my own barbarousnes I never heard the [illegible] d not my heart mooved more than [illegible] by some blinde crouder, with no [illegible] g so evill apparrelled in the dust [illegible] t would it worke trymmed in the [illegible] *for Poetrie* Compare Addison, *Spectator*, No. 70.

or in Douglas's challenge to Percy in the *Hunting of the Cheviot*:—

Then said the doughty Douglas
  Unto the Lord Persee,
"To kill all these guiltless men,
  Alas, it were great pitee.

"But, Percy, thou art a lord of land,
  I am a yerl called within my contree;
Let all our men upon a party stand,
  And do the battle of thee and of me."

"Now Christ's curse on his crown," said the Lord Persee,
  "Whosoever thereto says nay!
By my troth, doughty Douglas," he says,
  "Thou shalt never see that day.

"Neither in England, Scotland, nor France,
  Nor for no man of a woman born,
But, and fortune be my chance,
  I dare meet him, one man for one."

Richard Witherington's comment on this proposal has been already quoted, and is in itself evidence of exaggerated sentiment; for why should one of the *comitatus* interfere in a fair agreement to settle the matter by single combat? There is an equal amount of exaggeration in the minstrel's view of the importance of the battle:—

Of fifteen hundred archers of England
  Went away but seventy and three;
Of twenty hundred spearmen of Scotland
  But even five and fifté.

But all were slain Cheviot within;
  They had no strength to stand on hye;
The child may rue that is unborn;
  It was the more pitye.

Clearly there is a vast difference between the kind of social atmosphere which inspires such verse as this, and that all-pervading spirit of tribal patriotism which breathes with a steady flame through the *Death of Byrhtnoth*, and produces a passage like the following:—

"One of the shipmen crippled the hero's hand with a blow. The fallow-hilted sword fell to the ground; he could no longer hold it. But the gray battle-hero still cheered on the youths; his feet refused to serve him; he

looked toward heaven and said: 'I thank thee, Ruler of Peoples, for all the joys I have had in the world. Now, mild Creator, I have most need that thou grant my spirit good, that my soul may go to thee, may pass with peace into thy power, King of Angels.' Then the heathen struck him down, and the two heroes who fought near him, Ælfnoth and Wulfmær, gave up their spirits at their lord's side."

If again we compare the Robin Hood ballads with the legends which produced the Romances of the Round Table, we arrive at much the same conclusion. No cycle of ballads, indeed, furnishes a more striking example than the former, of the manner in which a popular myth grows and lives in the national memory. It is by no means necessary, though it may often happen, that a widespread legend should have its basis in positive fact; what is indispensable is that, at the fitting moment, a poet shall appear to personify in a definite form the feelings floating vaguely in the public imagination. There may, or may not, have been an actual outlaw named Robin Hood. As early as the beginning of the fifteenth century Robin Hood and Little John are spoken of as real personages,[1] but it may be doubted whether the chroniclers had any evidence of their existence more trustworthy than the ballads in which the outlaws are celebrated, and which are sarcastically referred to by Langland in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*.[2] It is plain, however, that the man who composed, or furnished the basis for, the ballad called *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, printed by Wynkyn de Worde, perhaps as early as 1492, was dealing, in the romantic form natural to a popular minstrel, with precisely the same kind of social circumstances as those with which Langland himself dealt as a moral reformer. The *Gest* opens with a description of Robin Hood's character and code of morals:—

[1] Wyntoun, *Chronicle of Scotland* about 1420, cited by Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part v. p. 41.

[2] Sloth, in the *Confession of the Seven Deadly Sins*, says, that he knows "rymes of Robin Hood and Randolf, Erle of Chester." Skeat's *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, vol. i. p. 167.

A good manner then had Robin Hood
  In land where that he were:
Every day ere he would dine
  Three masses would he hear.

The one in the worship of the Father,
  And another of the Holy Ghost,
The third of our dear Lady,
  That he loved of all the most.

Robin loved our dear Lady,
  For doubt of deadly sin.
Would he never do company harm
  That any woman was in.

"Master," then said Little John,
  "And we our board shall spread,
Tell us whither that we shall go,
  And what life that we shall lead;

"Where we shall take, where we shall leave,
  Where we shall abide behind;
Where we shall rob, where we shall reve,
  Where we shall beat and bind."

"Thereof no force," then said Robin,
  "We shall do well enow;
But look ye do no husband wrong,
  That tilleth with his plough.

"No more ye shall do no good yeoman,
  That walketh by greenwood shaw,
Ne no knight, ne no squier,
  That will be a good fellaw.

"These bishops and these archbishops
  Ye shall them beat and bind;
The high sheriff of Nottingham,
  Him hold ye in your mind."

Here we see the uprising of the Saxon spirit personified in the outlaw, Robin Hood, against tyranny and injustice, just as the ideas of the public conscience regarding the corruptions of the time are reflected in Piers the Ploughman. Both poets favour the same classes of the community, the knight, the squire, the yeoman, the husbandman; both attack the same classes of offenders, the highly-beneficed clergy, and corrupt ministers of justice, civil or ecclesiastical. In the course of the *Gest*, the Chief Justice of England appears, in collusion with an abbot, attempting to deprive a knight of his land; and a fat

monk, "an out-rider that lovéd venerie," is stripped by Robin of his superfluity.

But while the *sacer vates* of Robin Hood thus founded his main conception on the public opinion of his rude audience, it is most interesting to observe, in illustration of the decline of minstrelsy, how entirely he depends for his poetical details on pre-existing literary materials. Thus the idea of heroic outlawry seems to be derived from the story of Fulke Fitz-Warine, a noble robber in the time of King John;[1] the idea of Robin's piety is suggested by the tale of a knight in the *Legenda Aurea*, who was in the habit of robbing everybody who passed by his castle, but never allowed any business to come in the way of his devotions.[2] Robin in the *Gest* makes a loan to an impecunious knight, who first offers as his security "God that died on tree," and when this is declined, says that he can give no other but "our dear Lady"—a pledge that is at once accepted by the outlaw as sufficient. A similar incident is found recorded among the miracles of the Virgin, where also Our Lady intervenes to bring about the repayment of the money as she does in the ballad.[3] King John, in the history of Fulke Fitz-Warine, is decoyed by the outlaw with a stratagem like that which Robin uses with the Sheriff of Nottingham;[4] and Robin plays at "pluck-buffet" with the king, who goes to see him in the forest, in the manner first related by the old romance of *Richard Cœur de Lion*, and afterwards immortalised in *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott.[5] The Romances of the Round Table are also looked to as models. Robin Hood will not dine until he has met with some rich man to pay for his entertainment, any more than King Arthur will dine before he has heard of some adventure.[6]

[1] W. F. Prideaux in *Notes and Queries*, 7th series, ii. 421. Maid Marian seems to be taken from this romantic history. See Wright's *History of Fulke Fitz-Warine*, pp. 32, 33.

[2] Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part v. p. 51.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 51.

[4] Wright, *History of Fulke Fitz-Warine*, pp. 145-47.

[5] *Richard Cœur de Lion* (Weber, ii. 34), 748-98.

[6] Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ii. 257.

In bringing together these diverse materials, so as to present a story of interest and verisimilitude, the ballad-maker has given proof of no mean poetical skill, showing that the *Gest* must have been composed while the art of the trouvère was far from extinct; and in the same way the *Hunting of the Cheviot* points to the survival in certain parts of the country of the heroic genius of Teutonic minstrelsy. But the great majority of the ballads that have come down to us exhibit a course of always degenerating taste. When the poets of Europe first began to commit their thoughts to writing in the vulgar tongues, they naturally laid their foundations in the art of minstrelsy, so that many of the existing forms of oral recitation were transformed into instruments of literature. The lyrics of the troubadours grew into the sonnets of Dante and Petrarch: the metrical and prose romances made the starting point for *Don Quixote* and the modern novel; the *lai*, the *dit*, and the *fabliau* contain the germs of the *Canterbury Tales*, the Elizabethan drama, and the Georgian satire. Conversely, as the men of high imagination were drawn off to literary composition by the new wants of the court and castle, the singers of a poorer quality sought to gain a livelihood by carrying the old arts of minstrelsy into the country districts. Wanting in invention, and striving to adapt themselves to the tastes of their hearers, they naturally had recourse to the ideas of their predecessors; and accordingly we find, as an almost invariable rule, that the ballad, when composed in the first place for the purposes of amusement, reproduces, in a mould peculiar to itself, the subject matter of the older gests, romances, or lays. The tales on which it is founded are rarely, if ever, the legacy of long oral tradition: they can be traced through an incessant course of transmutations, combinations, and corruptions to a literary source; and at each stage of their journey we know that the art of some nameless poet must have been at work to clothe the migratory spirit in a new metrical form.

A ballad of the romantic class may be either (1) an abstract or skeleton of a romance such as *The Marriage*

of Sir Gawain, The Boy and Mantle, King Arthur and King Cornwall; (2) one of a variety of versions which have branched from the stem of a single *fabliau*, such as the numerous ballads deriving from the story of the Patient Griselda—*e.g. Fair Annet, Child Waters* and others; (3) a romance adapted to the character of some real personage, such as *Thomas the Rhymer;* or (4) a legend arising out of a confused recollection of history, such as *Sir Aldingar.* It may be useful to examine more particularly the character of the last-named ballad, as it furnishes an admirable example of the manner in which the materials of this class of poetry are preserved and modified.

The story of the ballad is as follows: Sir Aldingar, steward of a certain King Henry, being repulsed in an attempt on the virtue of his queen, revenges himself by placing a lazar or leper in her bed and showing him to the king, who determines in his rage to hang the leper and burn his wife. The queen claims a champion to prove her innocence by single combat, but for a long time is unable to find one who will undertake her cause. At last one of her messengers, riding into the East, meets with a little child, who sends word to her to be of good cheer; and on the day of the ordeal this strange champion appears in the lists, when the queen is actually at the stake, and challenging Sir Aldingar, who is a giant, to fight, strikes off his legs at the knee. The steward confesses his guilt: he, or his conqueror, urges the king to take back his wife; the leper is reprieved at the gallows foot, and is promoted to honour. This ballad was committed to writing in the middle of the seventeenth century; there is, of course, no evidence to show the length of its oral existence; but the language of the poem in its surviving form does not denote antiquity.

It is plain, however, that the story, on which the ballad was based, had been long established in literature. William of Malmesbury, writing about the middle of the twelfth century, relates that Gunhild, daughter of King Canute, and wife of the Emperor Henry III., a woman of extraordinary beauty, being accused of adultery, put

forward as her champion a boy who had accompanied her from England, and who miraculously cut off the legs of the queen's accuser, a man of gigantic stature. Gunhild after this declined to live with the king, and passed the rest of her days in a convent.[1]

The facts recorded of Gunhild by William are not historical, as she lived quietly with her husband and died of the plague at Ravenna two years after her marriage, in 1036. It is likely, however, that, as her married name was changed to Cunigunda, the story has been, partially at any rate, transferred to her account from that of St. Cunigund, wife of the Emperor Henry II., who, when accused of infidelity to her husband, offered to prove her innocence by walking over red-hot iron, and accomplished the feat. The confusion is the more probable, since Gunhild's mother Emma has the credit of having passed successfully through a similar ordeal,[2] which indeed figures in the lives of two other saintly queens, who ended their lives in monasteries: one, Richarda, wife of Charles III., in the ninth, and the other, Gundeberg, wife of the Lombard King Arioald, as far back as the seventh century. William of Malmesbury perhaps derived his account from a Latin poem on the subject. He does not mention the names of the actors in the story, but they are given in a French metrical life of Edward the Confessor, dating from the middle of the thirteenth century, and professing to be "translatée du Latin." From this we learn that the accuser's name was Rodegan, which in the original Latin was no doubt Rodingarus,[3] and the champion's, Mimecan.

All the materials were thus provided for the treatment of the story as a subject for minstrelsy, and in

[1] *De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, ii. 188 (Duffus Hardy's edition, 1840).

[2] A ballad on this subject seems to have been popular. It is mentioned in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*, when dykers and delvers are said to "drive forth the long day with, Dieu vous save Dame Emma," alluding to the favouring cries of the people that greeted the queen during the ordeal.

[3] The Latin name is given in the *Abbreviationes* of Ralph de Diceto, ed. Stubbs, i. 174; and it is Englished as Roddyngar in Brompton's *Chronicle*, written at the close of the fourteenth century.—*English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, iii. 38 (footnote).

this form it was at a later date widely propagated over the North of Europe. The tale of *Ravengaard og Memering* is preserved in Norwegian, Danish, and Icelandic ballads, the oldest of which was committed to writing in the middle of the sixteenth century, a hundred years before the oldest of the English versions. These Scandinavian ballads handle the facts recorded by William of Malmesbury in the free spirit of minstrelsy; and one of them, curiously enough, combines with them the story of Cunigund's and Emma's ordeal of walking on red-hot iron. There is nothing in the English ballad to show that the minstrel was indebted to his Norse predecessors: on the contrary his version up to a certain point would seem to be taken directly from the Latin, for "Sir Aldingar" is plainly a variation of Sir Raldingar, corrupted from Sir Rodingar; while in other respects the incidents of his story follow Malmesbury's narrative, rather than the version of *Ravengaard og Memering*. He seems, however, to have felt, what the Scandinavian minstrels overlooked, that it was a defect in the original story to represent the king accepting the charge against the queen on the mere word of the steward; and, to remedy this defect, he inserts the incident of the leper shown to the king lying in the queen's bed. This he probably borrowed from the *Karlamagnus Saga*, where Oliva, the sister of Charlemagne, is falsely accused of the same crime, and by the same kind of accuser, as Gunhilda, the charge being supported by the introduction into her bed of a black beggar.[1] The advance of rationalism is yet more visible in a later and balder version of the story, written down from the recitation of an old woman, and published in Scott's *Border Minstrelsy* in 1803. All supernatural details in the legend, such as the apparition of the mysterious child, and his victory over the gigantic steward, have disappeared in this ballad: the poet, improving on the *Karlamagnus Saga*, administers a drugged potion to the leper before conveying him to the queen's bed; the champion is a knight called Sir Hugh le

[1] *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part iii. p. 39.

Blond, whose sword, says Scott, was believed by the country people to be actually in the possession of his descendants![1]

Thomas the Rhymer, on the other hand, is a brilliant example of a ballad in which the art of minstrelsy is employed to preserve, in a glorified form, the memory of a real man in whom the popular imagination is interested. From the beginning of the fourteenth century the fame of Thomas of Erceldoune, or Thomas Rymour, or True Thomas, for prophecy, was celebrated through Scotland; and the predictions attributed to him had so much consistency, that in 1603 they were collected into a volume with the Prophecies of Merlin. Thomas Rymour of Erceldoune is known to have been a real person, who is reported to have been alive in the closing years of the thirteenth century; and it may well be believed that, in speaking of him, the country folk often discussed the question whence he derived his knowledge of the future. Scandinavian folk-lore would naturally have attributed his gift to the good-will of the elves, but the aid of a particular minstrel was required to describe the manner in which it was bestowed. Not original enough to invent a story for himself, the minstrel who took Thomas as his hero sought his materials in existing romances, and by the middle of the fifteenth century a poem, which forms the groundwork of the ballads on the subject, was committed to writing. In its most essential features the story in the poem was taken from the romance of *Ogier le Danois*, which relates how that hero was carried to Avalon by Morgan the Fay, and lived there for centuries without perceiving the lapse of time: moreover, the style of the narrative, particularly the length and detail of the descriptions, was in the approved manner of metrical romance.[2]

[1] *Border Minstrelsy* (1803), iii. 42.

[2] See *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part ii. pp. 326-29. The reader who will refer to Plutarch, *De Defectu Oraculorum*, c. 21, and Ælian, *Var. Hist.* iii. 18, will find in those two passages, the substance of which may have been transferred into some Latin Encyclopædia, the leading features in the stories of Ogier the Dane and Thomas the Rhymer; namely, Fairyland (the country called Ἄνοστος); the residence of mortals with immortals; the gift of prophecy bestowed on the former; their periodical return to the world of mankind; and the trees whose fruit produced for those who ate of it endless suffering or perpetual youth.

In a later age came the ballad-singer, who in this case must be allowed to have improved on the form of his original. He preserved the local touches, "Huntly Banks" and the "Eildon Tree," by which the fifteenth-century romance-writer had given an air of reality to his borrowed story, but condensed into a few rapidly moving stanzas the succession of marvels, which tended to lose their brilliancy in the diffuse narrative of his poem. At the same time his style shows signs of having been degraded to suit the tastes of a vulgar audience. Thomas, in the poem, is said to have put forth his hand to pluck the fruit growing in Fairyland, but is prevented by the fairy queen, for

> "If thou it pluck, soothly to say,
> Thy saule goes to the fire of hell."

The ballad-maker, in one of the existing versions, represents him as wishing to eat the fruit because he was hungry, while the fairy queen offers to satisfy him with most substantial food!

> "Hold your hand, Thomas," she said,
> "Hold your hand, that must not be,
> It was a' that cursed fruit o' thine
> Beggared man and woman in your countrie.
> But I have a loaf and a soup o' wine,
> And ye shall go home and dine with me."[1]

Thus the legend gradually assumed a shape which adapted it to the imagination of the whole country-side. The actual name, Thomas Rymour, was elevated, through the art imputed to its owner, into Thomas the Rhymer; the actual Eildon Tree came to be regarded with awe as the place at which Thomas entered into Fairyland; the established reputation of the lord of Erceldoune for second-sight was accounted for by his long residence in the kingdom of the elves.

The tendency of the late singer to particularise stories

[1] *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Version B, Part ii. p. 324. It must be observed, however, that the version given in the *Border Minstrelsy* avoids this vulgarity.

founded on time-honoured superstitions, for the purpose of bringing down his ideas to the level of his audience, is observable in such ballads as *Tam Lin* and *The Broomfield Hill*. The former is founded on the widespread ancient belief in transformation, and the hero, a water-sprite, is represented as having been carried off, like True Thomas, by the queen of the fairies; but his name is of a very rustic kind, and the heroine, Fair Janet, or Fair Jenny, who restores Tam to his human shape, holds her interviews with him at the well of Carterhaugh, at the confluence of the Ettrick with the Yarrow.[1] In *The Broomfield Hill* the story of a lady who disappoints her lovers by putting them to sleep with magic, which appears in a written form before the close of the twelfth century, is localised, and the magic feat is accomplished by means of the flowers growing on a particular hill.[2] In the same way, another ballad, founded on the very ancient idea of winning a bride by the guessing of riddles, ascribes the successful courtship to a hero, distinguished by the modern, and rather prosaic, name of Captain Wedderburn.[3]

In their style and sentiment the ballads reflect the tastes of those for whom they were composed. The object of the singer was always to present a striking dramatic story in a short form, with rapid transitions and violent contrasts. Hence, when he borrowed, as he usually did, the substance of a romance, he seized on the salient points, and brought them before the minds of his audience by vulgar exaggeration. For example, there are two considerable cycles of ballads, illustrating the patience of women, and founded on the story of Griselda, and also on the *Lai del Fresne*, told with such admirable delicacy by Marie de France. In *Child Waters*, which represents the former, the brutality of Count Walter, repulsive enough in Boccaccio's tale, is exaggerated into disgusting cruelty; while of Fair Annie, the forsaken heroine, who stands for La Fresne in Marie's *Lai*, after she has meekly welcomed her lover's bride, the ballad-maker says:—

1 *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part ii. p. 340.
2 *Ibid*. p. 390.
3 *Ibid*. p. 414.

Annie made her bed a little forbye
To hear what they might say;
"And ever alas!" Fair Annie cried,
"That I should see this day!

"Gin my seven sons were seven young rats,
Running on the castle wa',
And I were a gray cat mysell,
I soon would worry them a'."

Of the courtly refinements of chivalrous love it is needless to say there is no trace in the ballads; the passions represented in them are lovers' despair (as in *Lord Lovel*);[1] woman's jealousy (as in *Lord Thomas and Fair Annet*);[2] vengeance for dishonour by a husband (as in *Lady Barnard and Little Musgrave*),[3] or by a family (as in *Clerk Saunders*),[4] the avenging act being often accompanied by horrible barbarity (as in *Lady Barnard and Little Musgrave*).

As the ballad was usually a *précis* of a romance, it developed certain poetical features of its own, the most notable of which were abrupt transitions, repetitions of phrases, and conventional formulæ. The effect may be compared to what would be presented by a paragraph of prose, in which the sentences should be without connecting particles. Sometimes this habit of condensation produced brilliant effects, as may be seen in *Lady Barnard and Little Musgrave*, a splendid piece of swift and vigorous action. But, quite as often, compression led to obscurity, and in many ballads the story could not have been understood, if the singer had not prefaced it with some explanation. It is to be remembered that the music was an important part of the performance, so that there was always a temptation, in the composition of ballads, to let sound prevail over sense. Some results of this may be seen in the frequent introduction of meaningless burdens, and the constant use of the number *three*, on account of the convenience of the word for rhyming purposes.

It will not be inappropriate to close this chapter with a ballad, the history of which illustrates, in a striking

[1] *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part iii p. 204
[2] *Ibid.* p. 179. [3] *Ibid.* p. 242. [4] *Ibid.* p. 156.

manner, the genius of minstrelsy, and the facilities which the strongly-marked forms of this kind of poetry offer to the imitator. Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Border* contained the famous ballad of Mary Hamilton in the following form:—

1 Marie Hamilton's to the kirk gane,
Wi' ribbons in her hair;
The king thought mair o' Marie Hamilton
Than ony that were there.

2 Marie Hamilton's to the kirk gane,
Wi' ribbons on her breast;
The king thought mair o' Marie Hamilton
Than he listened to the priest.

3 Marie Hamilton's to the kirk gane,
Wi' gloves upon her hands;
The king thought mair o' Marie Hamilton
Than the queen and a' her lands.

4 She hadna been about the king's court
A month but barely one,
Till she was beloved by a' the king's court,
And the king the only man.

5 She hadna been about the king's court
A month but barely three,
Till frae the king's court Marie Hamilton
Marie Hamilton durstna be.

6 The king is to the Abbey gane,
To pu' the Abbey-tree,
To scale the babe frae Marie's heart!
But the thing it wadna be.

7 O she has row'd it in her apron,
And set it on the sea,—
"Gae sink ye, or swim ye, bonny babe,
Ye's get nae mair o' me."—

8 Word is to the kitchen gane,
And word is to the ha',
And word is to the noble room,
Amang the ladyes a',
That Marie Hamilton's brought to bed,
And the bonny babe's mist and awa'.

9 Scarcely had she lain down again,
And scarcely fa'en asleep,

When up then started our gude queen
  Just at her bed-feet;
Saying—"Marie Hamilton, where's your babe?
  For I am sure I heard it greet."—

10 "O no, O no, my noble queen!
  Think no such thing to be;
'Twas but a stitch into my side,
  And sair it troubles me."—

11 "Get up, get up, Marie Hamilton:
  Get up and follow me;
For I am going to Edinburgh town,
  A rich wedding for to see."—

12 O slowly, slowly rase she up,
  And slowly put she on,
And slowly rode she out the way
  Wi' mony a weary groan.

13 The queen was clad in scarlet,
  Her merry maids all in green;
And every town that they cam to,
  They took Marie for the queen.

14 "Ride hooly, hooly, gentlemen,
  Ride hooly now wi' me!
For never, I am sure, a wearier burd
  Rade in your companie."—

15 But little wist Marie Hamilton,
  When she rade on the brown,
That she was ga'en to Edinburgh town,
  And a' to be put down.

16 "Why weep ye so, ye burgess wives,
  Why look ye so on me?
O, I am going to Edinburgh town,
  A rich wedding for to see."—

17 When she gaed up the Tolbooth stairs,
  The corks frae her heels did flee;
And lang or e'er she cam down again,
  She was condemn'd to dee.

18 When she cam to the Netherbow Port,
  She laughed loud laughters three;
But when she cam to the gallows foot,
  The tears blinded her ee.

19 "Yestreen the queen had four Maries,
The night she'll hae but three;
There was Marie Seaton, and Marie Beaton,
And Marie Carmichael, and me.

20 "O, often have I dress'd my queen.
And put gold upon her hair;
But now I've gotten for my reward
The gallows to be my share.

21 "Often have I dress'd my queen,
And often made her bed;
But now I've gotten for my reward
The gallows tree to tread.

22 "I charge ye all, ye mariners,
When ye sail ower the faem,
Let neither my father nor mother get wit
But that I'm coming hame.

23 "I charge ye all, ye mariners,
That sail upon the sea,
Let neither my father nor mother get wit
This dog's death I'm to dee.

24 "For if my father and mother got wit,
And my bold brethren three,
O mickle wad be the gude red blude
This day wad be spilt for me!

25 "O little did my mother ken,
That day she cradled me,
The lands I was to travel in,
Or the death I was to dee."[1]

Scott was of opinion that this ballad was founded on a story told by John Knox of a child-murder, committed by a Frenchwoman of the court of Mary Queen of Scots, who had had an intrigue with an apothecary, and who, with her paramour, was executed for the crime. He observed, however, "It will readily strike the reader the tale has suffered great alterations, as handed down by tradition; the French waiting-woman being changed into Mary Hamilton, and the queen's apothecary into Henry Darnley." He might have added that Mary Hamilton was not one of the

[1] *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part vi. p. 392, Version I.

"Queen's Maries," any more than Mary Carmichael; the names of the four being really Mary Beaton, Mary Seaton, Mary Livingstone, and Mary Fleming. Another difficulty was pointed out by Kirkpatrick Sharpe in 1824. "If," said he, "Marie Hamilton was executed in Scotland, it is not likely that her relations resided beyond seas; and we have no proof that Hamilton was really the name of the woman who made a slip with the queen's apothecary."[1]

Sharpe's suspicions led him to track with great sagacity the story of the ballad to its true source. In 1719, one Mary Hamilton, maid of honour to the Empress Catherine, was beheaded *in Russia* for child-murder. She was a woman of extraordinary beauty, and had been the mistress of the Czar, but had fallen under the displeasure of himself and the Empress, and, having engaged in an intrigue with a certain Orlof, was accused of being the mother of a child, whose dead body had been found in a well, wrapped in a court napkin. Mary at first denied the charge, but, when put to the torture, confessed her guilt, and was condemned to death. On the scaffold she appeared dressed in white (as in one of the versions of the ballad), hoping, but vainly, to touch the heart of the Czar, who seems to have been present at the execution, in the same way as the King of Scotland is represented in some of the ballads[2]

Here was a set of facts excellently adapted for the ballad-maker's use; and looking to the history of minstrelsy, and the different versions of the ballad which have come down to us, it is not difficult to divine the stages by which the *Mary Hamilton* of Scott's version came into existence. The first maker, evidently a man of some genius, conceived the happy idea of throwing back the incidents of the actual tragedy into the reign of Mary Queen of Scots, and turning the real Mary Hamilton into one of the Queen's Maries[3] In doing this he may have been helped by some ballad with which he was acquainted, for John Knox says in his *History of the Reformation:* "What bruit the Maries and

[1] Preface to *Ballad Book*, p. 18 (1824)
[2] For a full account of the story see *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part vi. pp. 382 83.
[3] See Version A in *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Part vi. p 384.

the rest of the dancers of the court had the ballads of that age did witness, which we for modesty's sake omit."[1] The incidents in the ballad of the murder of the child, and Mary Hamilton's denial of her guilt, were naturally suggested by the actual facts; but the circumstances leading to the execution, namely, the order given by the Queen, the entrance of Mary into Edinburgh, and her speech on the scaffold, are admirable inventions of the poet. Stanza 18 of the ballad is borrowed from *Sir Patrick Spens;* and the fine thought of the address to the sailors was suggested partly by the fact of a Scotswoman being executed in Russia, and partly by two pathetic stanzas in the ballad of the *Twa Brothers*, in which a boy, having accidentally received a mortal wound from his brother, urges the latter to conceal his death from their parents.[2] But though the genius of this ballad-maker was considerable, his taste was vulgar. He begins as follows:—

Word's gane to the kitchen,
  And word's gane to the ha',
That Marie Hamilton gangs with bairn
  To the highest Stewart of a'.

He's courted her in the kitchen,
  He's courted her in the ha',
He's courted her in the laigh cellar,
  And that was warst of a'.

When Mary is about to die,

"Bring me a bottle of wine," she says,
  "The best that e'er ye hae,
That I may drink to my well-wishers,
  And they may drink to me."

He closed his ballad with stanza 19 of Scott's version.

[1] *History of the Reformation*, Knox's Works (Laing), vol. ii. 415.

[2] "But what will I say to my father dear,
  Gin he chance to say, 'Willie, whar's John?'"
"Oh say that he's to England gone
  To buy him a cask of wine."

"And what will I say to my mother dear,
  Gin she chance to say, 'Willie, whar's John?'"
"Oh say that he's to England gone
  To buy her a new silk gown."

A later maker, of very fine taste, perceiving the merits and defects of this version, removed the vulgar details, supplied the poetical opening as it stands in Scott's version, added the effective touch of the "rich wedding," which the Queen gives as the reason for the journey to Edinburgh, and judiciously closed the poem, in the same way as the original inventor, with the beautifully melodious stanza about the Queen's Maries.[1] Like his predecessor, however, he spoke of Mary Queen of Scots in a very unhistorical manner:—

And down then cam the *auld* queen,
Goud tassels tied her hair.

Scott's poet saw that this was wrong, and changed "auld" into "*gude* queen"; but in other respects altered the second maker's version much for the worse. He had, indeed, sufficient taste to preserve the amended opening, but he seems to have been loth to part with the details of "the kitchen" and "the ha'," which he reintroduces at a later stage. Nor was he well inspired when he changed the position of the stanza on the Queen's Maries, leaving the poem with a flat and prosaic ending.

The curious history of this ballad has a practical significance for the critic, in view of the great influence which, since the publication of the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, the ballad form has exercised on the course of our poetry. Appearing at a time when there was an incipient revolt in the world of taste against the trammels of classical rule, and an uprising of the democratic spirit against government by aristocracy, Percy's book was seized as a weapon by the leaders of the new movement. They argued from its contents that the ballad was the heroic product of popular genius; and they contrasted the supposed "natural" style of the ballad with the "poetical diction," in vogue with the verse-writers of the day, against which they directed their main attack. The history of ballad poetry, however, does not justify their reasoning. All the evidence cited in this chapter shows that, so far

[1] *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, p. 390, Version G.

om the ballad being a spontaneous product of popular magination, it was a type of poem adapted, by the pro- fessors of the declining art of minstrelsy, from the romances once in favour with the educated classes. Everything in the ballad—matter, form, composition—is the work of the minstrel; all that the people do is to remember and repeat what the minstrel has put together; and, in order to assist the memory, the minstrel continues to use from age to age stereotyped moulds of diction, no less artificial than the stilted phraseology of literary poetry criticised by Wordsworth.

Mary Hamilton furnishes an apt illustration of this remark. The story does not take its rise out of Scottish history: the ballad-maker chooses a striking incident from foreign parts, and gives it a national colour to suit the taste of his audience. The language of the ballad in no way reflects "the language of the peasantry," but follows the venerable precedents handed down by generations of minstrels. Mary Hamilton laughs "loud laughters three," and "the tear blinds her ee," because the same kind of emotion had been previously exhibite by Sir Patrick Spens; the accent is thrown upon th last syllable in a word like "bodye," because one age poets after another had found this obsolete pronunciati useful for rhyming purposes; when the Queen bids M rise, she does not say, as Wordsworth would have requi "for I am going to Edinburgh to see a rich wédding,"

For I am going to Edinburgh town
A rich wedding for to see.

By artifices of this kind a ballad-maker, putti materials into shape at least as late as 1719, is easi to persuade a critic, so familiar with the style of mi as Scott, that, in *Mary Hamilton*, oral tradition has p through many generations the memory of a real in the court of Mary Queen of Scots.

CHAPTER XII

A RETROSPECT

THE reader was warned that, in the early stages of this history, he must not look for the interest arising out of biographical or artistic detail. We have to regard the art of English poetry as a reflection of the imaginative life of the English people; and it would be as unreasonable to expect a clearly defined conscience, or finished eloquence, in a young nation, as in a young child. What is of interest in our early poetry is the growth of embryonic life; the fusion of the opposite characters of antagonistic races, the gradual formation of moulds of thought, the secret transmutations of language and rhythm. The course of the narrative has hitherto been confined to the development of metrical composition during the Middle Ages, when the poets are seen for the most part to be creating new forms of art out of the swathing bands and envelopes of thought with which they are surrounded. Except in the work of Chaucer, no commanding personality of character has yet made its appearance, but now that we are entering on the period of the Renaissance and the Reformation, we shall soon see that Englishmen have, through the labours of their predecessors, acquired the power of giving harmonious expression to their individual ideas and sentiments. It will be well, therefore, before approaching the works of Surrey and Wyatt, to survey the extent of the ground described in this volume as having been conquered for the rising art of English poetry.

In order to trace the connection of thought between the period known as the Renaissance and the period

known as the Middle Ages, it was necessary to show how the intellectual system of the Middle Ages grew out of the Roman Empire. Hence, at the outset of this history, we occupied ourselves with a brief preliminary survey of the state of European society, on the eve of the irruption of the barbarians. Looking back to those times, a multitude of cities is seen in the south and west of Europe, in Asia Minor, and along the shores of the Mediterranean, preserving, under the guardianship of the Roman Empire, all the treasures bequeathed to them by ancient art and philosophy, but, politically and intellectually, vegetating in the last stages of decay. One great organisation alone, the Christian Church, remains conspicuously alive in the midst of the universal torpor, and absorbs into its system the various vital forces, which once animated the framework of Hellenic culture. Then the dykes of civilisation give way, and the face of civilised Europe is covered with wave after wave of those whom the "populous North" poured from

> Her frozen loins, to cross
> Rhene or the Danaw, when her barbarous sons
> Came like a deluge on the South, and spread
> Beneath Gibraltar to the Libyan sands.

All traces of the ancient civilisation seem to be submerged beneath the ever-flowing tide of barbaric immigration. Nevertheless the continuity of intellectual life is all the time secretly maintained by the educational system of the Catholic Church; and on the Continent old ideas and traditions pass into the life of Europe in a new form by the transmutation of the tongues of the barbarous conquerors into the Romance languages. The fresh and vigorous imagination of the Teutonic tribesman is refined by the intellectual training of the Church; and his minstrels, introduced to rich sources of knowledge, learn how to convert poetry from an oral into a literary art.

Posted on the western flank of Europe, and preserved by their insular position from the succession of tempests, which, with each new tide of conquest, make fresh ravages in what remains of civil society on the Continent, the various Teutonic tribes, after their settlement in Britain,

fuse themselves, by means of common laws, customs, and language, into a single nation. But they lose vitality by isolation; and, in the eleventh century, the Anglo-Saxons, lacking initiative energy, need the shock of the Norman Conquest to bring them into sympathy with the main current of European life. The fusion of French thoughts, words, and metres in the body of the slowly changing "Englisc" prepares the way for those forms of metrical harmony, in which Chaucer expresses the ideas of the English nation, as it emerges from its mediæval chrysalis into a consciousness of its own existence.

The various classes of English poetry—epical, allegorical, dramatic—reviewed in this volume, are to be regarded as the moulds which poetical invention constructed for itself out of its intellectual surroundings. In each class we see the same principle at work, namely, a movement away from the original didactic purpose of poetry, either towards the direct imitation of nature, or towards the mere technical development of art. Thus the moral character of the tale, as illustrated in the fables of Bidpai, changes gradually into the epical representation of human action and passion. The elaborate "moralisation," with which the ecclesiastical story-teller of the *Gesta Romanorum* sanctifies profane fables, is dropped in the *Canterbury Tales*; the "occasion," which provides the framework for the collection of written stories, is sought by Boccaccio and Chaucer in the incidents of actual life.

A somewhat similar movement discovers itself in the history of allegorical poetry. Allegory is at first employed as an aid to spiritual thought, as in the myths of Plato or in the parables of the Bible. Afterwards it becomes the recognised philosophical method of interpretation, and, being applied to the text of Scripture, is universally adopted as a necessary part of Christian instruction. An atmosphere of scholasticism is thus created, which in course of time generates a new kind of poetry. The habit of abstract thinking multiplies the personification of abstract qualities; these are then engaged in an imaginary action, as in the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, or in Martianus

Capella's *Marriage of Mercury with Philology;* while, at a later period, the order of material nature is taken, in the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, as a symbol of the order of the spiritual world. The forms of allegory are used for moral and satiric purposes, by John de Meung in the *Roman de la Rose*, and by Langland in the *Vision of Piers the Plowman.* They also naturally associate themselves with the conceptions of chivalrous love, first embodied in the lyrics of the troubadours, and afterwards transferred into the didactic narrative of William de Lorris. Finally, when these various kinds of matter are exhausted, the form of allegory is still preserved as a stereotyped mode of composition, and abstract personages penetrate even into the regions of romance, as in Hawes's *Pastime of Pleasure.*

So too with the Drama. Employed in the first instance by the clergy, to bring home Scripture truths to the minds of the people, in a visible form, the Miracle Play is soon appropriated by the people themselves, as a mode of entertainment for their religious festivals. The principle of imitation by degrees overpowers the principle of instruction; the dramatist, who, in the first instance, thought principally of the meaning of the Scripture dogma, begins to occupy himself with the human interest of the imaginary situation; in course of time he enlarges the scope of the sacred drama, by introducing the action of allegorical personages; hence arises the new dramatic form of the Morality, in which the poet is able to use greater freedom in the elaboration of his plot and fable. From this point it requires but a single step to drop the direct didactic purpose of the play; to leave the moral to be inferred from the situation; and to rely entirely on the interest excited by the action and passion of the *dramatis personæ.*

In considering the origin and growth of these poetical forms, it will be at once observed that the facts we have noticed co-exist with certain universal conditions of thought, which limit the imagination of the individual poet. Of these the most potent is the Education of the Church. With the exception of Chaucer, Gower, and James I of Scotland, every poet of mark before the time

of Surrey seems to have been brought up with a view to the Church as his profession, and even those who are excepted show in a marked manner the effects of the training they have received. All of them love to display their encyclopædic learning. All of them cite with deliberation the authorities from whom their learning is derived; and the far-reaching influence of certain text-books in general use—particularly Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*, Martianus Capella's *Marriage of Mercury with Philology*, Alanus de Insulis' *De Planctu Naturæ*, a large variety of *Physiologi*, besides the works of the greater Fathers such as St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and St. Gregory—is always apparent in works of imagination. All of the specially mediæval poets again write with a more or less theological aim, and formulate their learning by means of the logical system prevailing in the Schools.

Next to education the most powerful force, in the production of modern poetical forms, is the existing code of Feudal Manners and Institutions. The bard or minstrel is himself an essential part of the fabric of tribal society, and he naturally moulds his inventions, oral or literary, to meet the changing tastes of his audience. Hence, as we have seen, arise successively the forms of the *lied* or *lay*, the *chanson de geste*, the *roman*; the lyrics of the troubadours adapt themselves to the requirements of the Courts of Love; and, at a later period, the sentiment of these institutions, allying itself with the genius of the Schools, produces the type of the chivalrous allegory.

Finally, the Drama, in its infant form, is the direct product of religious Ritual; the festival of Corpus Christi becomes as powerful an instrument as the Dionysia at Athens for the encouragement of the actor's art.

But while the principal forms of modern poetry have their origin in the ecclesiastical and feudal character of the Middle Ages, they are gradually modified by the whole movement of society towards a Civil standard of life and thought. The course of this history has shown how the minstrel, once the retainer and panegyrist of the [illegible] chief, was forced by the march of events to look for the

country, had settled as a hosier in London, was born at 21 Broad Street, near Golden Square, on the 28th of November 1757. His father was a disciple of Swedenborg. That mystical Evangelist had prophesied that in the year 1757, the old world having ended, all things would henceforth be made new, a saying which evidently sank deeply into the mind of young Blake, from the coincidence of the supposed Revolution with the year of his birth, and which contributed largely to the particular form assumed by his mysticism. At a very early age he began to see visions: he met angels in his walks, and conversed with the Hebrew Prophets in the fields near London. He was never sent to school, but, having shown a talent for painting, was put to learn drawing from one Parr, with whom he studied for three or four years, passing from him to an apprenticeship of two years under Basire, an engraver. His hasty temper brought him into such difficulties with his fellow-students that Basire thought it best to send him by himself to copy the monuments in Westminster Abbey, and in this occupation he spent five years, drinking in the influences of Gothic architecture, and casting his ideas into poetry.

In his twentieth year his apprenticeship came to an end. He became an independent engraver, and soon made the acquaintance of Flaxman and Fuseli, who, with a few other kindred spirits, made up a literary coterie, which met in the house of one Matthews, a clergyman. By them Blake was aided in 1783 to publish his first volume of poems, entitled *Poetical Sketches.* Perhaps the indifference with which the book was received by the public irritated a temper naturally violent: at any rate Blake quarrelled with his partner—a fellow-apprentice who had joined him in the business of print-selling in 1784—and wrote a satire upon the Matthews coterie full of vehement invective against the thought and taste of the age. In course of time his poetry began to show the effects of his communion with spirits. He had taken his younger brother Robert as an apprentice in 1784. In 1787 Robert died, and one night soon after his death

appeared to William, showing him how to engrave his poems upon copper, and to decorate the border of each page. In the form thus revealed to him Blake published in 1789 *Songs of Innocence*, together with *The Book of Thel*, the first of those *Prophetic Books* which he believed to be dictated by supernatural inspiration.

"I have written this poem," he said, at a later date, speaking of his *Jerusalem*, "twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without premeditation and even against my will. The time it has taken in writing was thus rendered non-existent, and an immense poem exists which seems the labour of a long life, all produced without labour or study."

In the transcription of these mystical prophecies he continued till 1804, writing during the same period *Songs of Experience* and *Ideas of Good and Evil*. The last three years of this period he spent in the village of Felpham in Sussex, and in the exceedingly uncongenial society of the poetaster Hayley, who had employed him in engraving the illustrations for his *Life of Cowper*. After 1804 he seems to have ceased poetical composition, and to have passed into his really great epoch of pictorial invention. This took the form of illustration, his subjects being chosen from other men's poetry, and it comprised engravings for Robert Blair's *Grave* (1804-5), designs for *The Book of Job* (1821), for water-colour illustrations for Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1822) and Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1825). Blake died on the 12th of August 1827.

The imaginative style of this poet reveals throughout the natural genius of a painter, which, had it been disciplined in that great age of the art in England, and been directed always to intelligible objects, might have made Blake the foremost of English masters in the heroic class of painting; though such self-control would doubtless have deprived his work of some of the characteristic extravagance which, in the eyes of his devout admirers, is his greatest merit. This was not to be. The poverty of his family prevented him in his early days from pursuing his studies as a painter on liberal lines; his own generous feeling suggested his apprenticeship to an engraver; his

father's indulgence left him without the discipline of school; and, at an age when the mind is most open to impressions, he steeped his thought in the writings of Swedenborg. Everything conspired to persuade him that his probably unequalled power of calling up the images of unseen things was given to him as a direct revelation of the invisible world: yet even so it was long before he surrendered his judgment unreservedly to spiritual impulse. When he published his first volume, *Poetical Sketches*, he asked the indulgence of his readers in a modest tone recalling the similar appeal of Burns:

> The following Sketches were the production of untutored youth, commenced in his twelfth, and occasionally resumed by the author till his twentieth, year; since which time, his talents having been wholly directed to the attainment of excellence in his profession, he has been deprived of the leisure requisite for such a revisal of these sheets as might have rendered them less unfit to meet the public eye.
>
> Conscious of the irregularities and defects found on almost every page, his friends still believed that they possessed a poetical originality which merited some respite from oblivion. These opinions remain, however, to be now re-proved or confirmed by a less partial public.

The poems in the volume, indeed, far from being mature works of art, were evidently the production of a boy. Some of them were faint echoes of what the poet had read;[1] others were inartistic imitations of well-marked poetical styles:[2] in point of rhythm and rhyme many of them were singularly defective. Nevertheless, originality, blended with invention, was everywhere visible: a charming freshness and simplicity of feeling, and an exuberant wealth of imagery, gave character to the poems. In the following stanza, for example, the mixture of the seventeenth and eighteenth century manners is very significant, as showing the extent to which Blake's early work was the result of literary imitation:

[1] See the imitation of Shakespeare in the song beginning, "My silks and fine array." Yeats, *Poems of William Blake*, p. 7.

[2] As in the "Imitation of Spenser," *Poems of William Blake* (W. B. Yeats), p. 13.

With sweet May-dews my wings were wet,
And Phoebus fired my vocal rage:
He caught me in his silken net,
And shut me in his golden cage.[1]

But in the next stanza the extraordinary picturesqueness of the image strikes an "original" note:

He loves to sit and hear me sing;
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;
Then stretches out my golden wing,
And mocks my loss of liberty.[2]

Here and there too was to be found a little poem perfect in sentiment and form, such as the lines *To the Muses*:

Whether on Ida's shady brow,
Or in the chambers of the East,
The chambers of the Sun, that now
From ancient melodies have ceased;

Whether in heaven ye wander fair,
Or the green corners of the earth,
Or the blue regions of the air,
Where the melodious winds have birth;

Whether on crystal rocks ye rove
Beneath the bosom of the sea,
Wandering in many a coral grove,
Fair Nine, forsaking Poetry;

How have you left the ancient love,
That bards of old enjoyed in you!
The languid strings do scarcely move,
The sound is forced, the notes are few.[3]

A fragment of a drama, *Edward III*, essentially undramatic, and imperfect in its rhythms, has many fine lines breathing ardent thoughts on death and immortality. But there is in these youthful lyrics scarcely any trace of the mysticism which in later years became the predominant note in Blake's poetry. As I have already suggested, self-esteem, irritated by the public insensibility to genius, may have been, in part at least, the cause of the increasing arrogance with which he afterwards asserted the supernatural truth of his visions. Swedenborg's interpretation of the Scriptures, on which his mind had

[1] *Poems of William Blake* (Yeats), p. 7.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 7.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 12.

been nurtured in childhood, colours all the *Songs of Innocence*: the underlying idea is of a golden age of humanity, which has been obscured by the blindness and corruption of man's fallen nature, but of which symbolic glimpses may still be gained, in the beautiful sights and sounds of Nature and in the appearances of angels. The songs, in their spirit of simple faith and piety, resemble Watts' *Songs for Children*, but to this there is added a charmingly decorative border of mystical fancy, essentially Swedenborgian in its origin. The keynote of feeling is struck in stanzas such as:

Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
Is God our Father dear,
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
Is Man His child and care—[1]

a doctrine which is applied in the song *On Another's Sorrow*:

And can He, who smiles on all,
Hear the wren with sorrows small,
Hear the small bird's grief and care,
Hear the woes that infants bear—

And not sit beside the nest,
Pouring pity in their breast,
And not sit the cradle near,
Weeping tear on infant tear?

And not sit both night and day,
Wiping all our tears away?
Oh no! never can it be!
Never, never can it be!

He doth give His joy to all;
He becomes an infant small;
He becomes a man of woe,
He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
And thy Maker is not by:
Think not thou canst weep a tear,
And thy Maker is not near.

O He gives to us His joy,
That our grief He may destroy:
Till our grief is fled and gone
He doth sit by us and moan.[2]

[1] *Poems of William Blake* (Yeats), p. 55. [2] *Ibid.* p. 61.

Allowing for a certain eccentricity of expression, there is nothing in such thoughts alien to the universal Christian Faith. But as time advanced, Blake, like all mystics became convinced of the infallibility of his own inspiration, and correspondingly dissatisfied with the teaching of his old master. In his *Prophetic Book* called *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he writes thus of Swedenborg:

> I have always found that angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning
>
> Thus Swedenborg boasts that what he writes is new; though it is only the contents or index of already published books.
>
> A man carried a monkey about for a show, and because he was a little wiser than the monkey grew vain, and conceived himself as much wiser than seven men. It is so with Swedenborg: he shows the folly of churches and exposes hypocrites, till he imagines that all are religious, and himself the only one on earth that ever broke a net.
>
> Now hear a plain fact. Swedenborg has not written any new truth. Now hear another: he has written all the old falsehoods.
>
> And now hear the reason. he conversed with angels who are all religious, and conversed not with devils who all hate religion, for he was incapable through his conceited notions.
>
> Thus Swedenborg's writings are a recapitulation of all superficial opinions, and an analysis of the more sublime, but no further
>
> Hear now another plain fact: any man of mechanical talents may, from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's, and from those of Dante and Shakespeare an infinite number.[1]

It is characteristic of Blake never to have recognised that what he wrote about Swedenborg was applicable to himself. It would be waste of time to attempt to track minutely the subtleties of his thought, and unphilosophical to regard (with some of his editors) his vagaries of fancy as revelations supernaturally conveying hidden truths.[2] But in order to measure the value of his art, it should be remembered that his compositions are grounded on certain fixed beliefs, the principal of which are—that the

[1] Yeats, *Poems of William Blake*, p. 167. [2] *Ibid.* p. xxxix.

traditional interpretation of the Bible is a delusion and a snare;[1] that all scientific reasoning, including the philosophy of Newton, founded on the observation of sensible things, is deceptive,[2] since the world of matter is chaotic and unreal; and that the only perceptions to be trusted are the intuitions of the artist, whether poet, painter, or musician.[3] As his indignation with the accepted creeds of society increased, he pushed on always farther from his mystical starting-point until his own philosophy became a Pantheistic jumble, made up of fancies borrowed from the early Gnostics or the Cabbala, together with ideas of Christian mystics from the time of Tauler, and the transcendental magic of Paracelsus and Cornelius Agrippa, the whole producing a result hardly distinguishable from Devil-worship. The general bent of his speculations is the subversion of all intellectual "authority"; and the typical monument of his inspiration in this department is a poem called significantly *The Everlasting Gospel*, certain phrases of which have so shocked some of his more matter-of-fact editors, that they have amended his text in such a way as to destroy its obvious intention.[4]

Turning from the technical characteristics in the lyrical poems of Burns and Blake to the social spirit of which they are the reflection, it is evident that the verse of both is the index, and to a great extent the product, of volcanic forces, shaking the foundations of European order. Both were moved by the genius of the French Revolution: the former, in his last days, associated with agitators who defended the worst excesses of the French anarchists: the latter was the friend and champion of Tom Paine. In Burns, however, the revolutionary spirit was unconsciously controlled by the instinct of patriotism: a peasant, with an ardent love of his native soil, his imagination mounted on the democratic wave, because he seemed thus to gain enlarged views of life and liberty for himself, his class, and the whole Scottish nation. As he says of his poetry:

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[1] See p. 77.
[2] *Poems of William Blake*, p. 108.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 202.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 242.

The hero of these artless strains
  A lowly Bard was he,
Who sung his rhymes in Coila's plains
  With meikle mirth and glee:
Kind Nature's care had given him share
  Large of the flaming current,
And, all devout, he never sought
  To stem the sacred torrent.

The words and rhythms in which he sought to express his imaginative impulses were essentially national, and derived their volume from past generations which had mingled their blood and thought in the history of their country. No doubt the same impulses carried him at times into invectives against the distinctions and privileges of rank, as in the well-known lines:

Ye see yon birkie ca'd a lord,
  Wha struts, and stares, an' a' that?
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
  He's but a cuif for a' that.
For a' that an' a' that,
  His ribband, star, an' a' that,
The man o' independent mind,
  He looks an' laughs at a' that.

A prince can mak' a belted knight,
  A marquis, duke, an' a' that!
But an honest man's aboon his might:
  Guid faith, he mauna fa' that.
For a' that an' a' that,
  Their dignities an' a' that,
The pith o' sense an' pride o' worth
  Are higher rank than a' that.

Then let us pray that come it may
  (As come it will for a' that),
That Sense and Worth o'er all the earth
  Shall bear the gree an' a' that!
For a' that an' a' that,
  It's comin' yet for a' that,
That man to man the world o'er
  Shall brithers be for a' that.

Lines like these, inspired by a fresh and genuine sentiment, but staled by mechanical repetition on party platforms, have come to breathe a suspicion of clap-trap; and the

strain of cheap rhetoric recurs in a much more offensive form in Burns's *Tree of Liberty*, if indeed (which seems doubtful) he is responsible for that poor rant. But in general the working of the spirit of Liberty in Burns shows itself in a spontaneity and naturalness of feeling, which—whether he is giving utterance to his sentimental Jacobitism, as in *Charlie is my darling*, and *O'er the water to Charlie*, or to his thirst for national independence, as in *Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled*, or to his dislike of Kirk discipline, as in *The Epistle to William Simpson*—always seems to reflect in the right form of the vernacular the refined patriotism of a free peasantry.

In Blake, on the contrary, the atmosphere of the French Revolution developed an extravagance of imagination, which often drove his poetical genius, in its craving for Liberty, into the realms of chaos. It seems unquestionable that truly great art, as it implies a community of feeling between the artist and those to whom his art is addressed, must require a certain foundation and framework of convention. What is true of art in general is especially true of poetry, since this, the most social of the arts, finds its instrument in language; and words, being the conventional symbols by means of which men communicate their ideas, are not fitted to express the merely exceptional experience of the individual. Blake's *Prophetic Books*, and many of his lyrics, often remind us of Horace's genial lines on the mad gentleman of Argos, who derived enjoyment from sitting in the empty theatre under the belief that he was witnessing fine tragedies on the stage.[1] But Horace's monomaniac

[1] Horace, *Epist.* ii. 2. 128-140.

Fuit haud ignobilis Argis
qui se credebat miros audire tragoedos
in vacuo laetus sessor plausorque theatro.
cetera qui vitae servaret munia recto
more, bonus sane vicinus, amabilis hospes,
comis in uxorem, posset qui ignoscere servis,
et signo laeso non insanire lagenae;
posset qui rupem et puteum vitare patentem.
hic ubi, cognatorum opibus curisque refectus,
expulit elleboro morbum bilemque meraco,
et redit ad sese "pol! me occidistis, amici,
non servastis" ait "cui sic extorta voluptas
et demtus per vim mentis gratissimus error."

"Lost in desert wild
Is your little child.
How can Lyca sleep,
If her mother weep?

"If her heart does ache,
Then let Lyca wake;
If my mother sleep,
Lyca shall not weep.

"Frowning, frowning night,
O'er the desert bright
Let thy moon arise,
While I close my eyes."

Sleeping Lyca lay,
While the beasts of prey,
Come from caverns deep,
Viewed the maid asleep.

The kingly lion stood,
And the virgin viewed;
Then he gambolled round
O'er the hallowed ground.

Leopards, tigers, play
Round her as she lay;
While the lion old
Did bow his mane of gold,

And her bosom lick,
And upon her neck
From his eyes of flame
Ruby tears there came:

While the lioness
Loosed her slender dress;
And naked they conveyed
To caves the sleeping maid.

On the other hand, where—as in the following lines—the poet seems mainly anxious to put into words his own visionary view of the unseen world, the imagery becomes chaotic and the poetry degenerates into doggerel:

I stood in the streams
Of heaven's bright beams
And saw Felpham sweet
Beneath my bright feet,
In soft female charms;
And in her fair arms

My shadow I knew,
And my wife's shadow too,
And my sister and friend.
We like infants descend
In our shadows on earth,
Like a weak mortal birth.
My eyes, more and more,
Like a sea without shore,
Continue expanding,
The heavens commanding,
Till the jewels of light,
Heavenly men, beaming bright,
Appeared as one man,
Who complacent began
My limbs to enfold
In his beams of bright gold;
Like dross purged away
All my mire and my clay.

Throughout the verse of Blake we feel the born painter of genius trying to make poetry do the work of his own art. More often than not he fails, because, for the reason I have already suggested, the necessary conventions of language imprison him within limits embarrassing to the movement of his imagination. It is different when he is expressing himself by means of pictorial forms, for here imagination has more natural liberty, while at the same time the very conditions of his art compel him to restrict himself within intelligible limits. The real greatness of his artistic power is seen when his invention as a painter is employed in the illustration of other men's poetry. A certain conventional base being prescribed for him, the sublimity and congeniality of the subject with which he deals allow full scope for original creation. It will scarcely be disputed that the finest monuments of his genius are his illustrations of Blair's *Grave*, *The Book of Job*, Dante's *Inferno*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In three of these texts his imagination moves in the region created for him by congenial spirits: in the fourth the grand conceptions embodied in his outlined images release the reader's thought from the limits within which it is confined by Blair's commonplace verse.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW WHIGS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON POETRY AND CRITICISM

The Edinburgh Review

Samuel Rogers: Thomas Campbell: Thomas Moore

On the 5th May 1789 the States-General of France, never summoned since 1614, met again at Versailles. The 14th of the following July saw the destruction of the Bastille by the populace of Paris, and the tumultuary movement of the French Revolution increased in vehemence from day to day. The course of events in France soon showed the effects that had been produced on political life in England by the advance of the spirit of Revolutionary Liberty. When tidings of the fall of the Bastille reached England, Fox exclaimed: "How much is it the greatest event that ever happened in the world! And how much the best!" About two years later, during the debate on the Canada Bill, he declared that he regarded the new French Constitution "as a most stupendous and glorious fabric of liberty."[1] Burke, on the contrary, denounced it "as a building composed of untempered mortar—as the work of Goths and Vandals where everything was disjointed and inverted."[2] The memorable rupture between Burke and Fox was the result of this antagonism of political opinion.

It is indeed evident that the cleavage of parties symbolised by it was caused by the deepest divisions of principle, not only political but social, and involving elements of taste, sentiment, and imagination, as well as

[1] Lord Stanhope, *Life of Pitt*, vol. ii. p. 46.

[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 95.

practical philosophy. The old English Parties, Whig and Tory alike, had their roots deep in the Monarchical and aristocratic traditions of the national history: the new departure of Fox and his disciples took for its base the abstract principles of Liberty and Equality advocated by the philosophers of the French National Assembly. Burke, in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, pleads with impassioned eloquence, not only as an English statesman, but as the champion of the ancient Feudal and Ecclesiastical System of Europe; Fox, as events developed, was forced, involuntarily, to identify himself more and more closely with the cosmopolitan, anti-national tendencies represented by such extra-Parliamentary bodies as the Constitutional Society, the Revolution Society, and the Friends of the People. Inevitably, therefore, a fusion was gradually effected between the remains of the old historic parties, Whig or Tory, while the New Whigs, separated into a special organisation, placed themselves at the head of the party movement, which at last effected the fundamental change in the Constitution involved in the Reform Bill of 1832.

This evolution of political parties in England was accompanied by an almost exactly parallel change of literary taste. In the last volume I described the gradual formation of that court of Public Opinion which after the Revolution of 1688 exercised such influence in determining the standards of artistic imagination.[1] The pioneers of this movement in literature, like their colleagues in politics, were Whigs; and indeed the orderly settlement of the Revolution could not have been effected without close co-operation between Whig men of action and Whig men of letters. I have endeavoured to define the double principle, political and literary, on which Addison and Steele sought to reconcile the conflicting principles in the imagination of their time True children of the Renaissance, it was their aim to develop the civil element in the constitution of their country, without disturbing those feudal and ecclesiastical institutions

[1] Vol. v chap. iv.

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[1] Vol. v. chap. iv.

the essays contained in it showed a greater variety of matter and style than those of the earlier publication. The chief historical value of *The Adventurer* lies in the clear indication given in it of the tendency, in the more learned class of readers, to separate interest in literature from the active pursuits of life, and, by a necessary consequence, to isolate the diction of prose, which Addison and Swift had been careful to ground on conversation, within more strictly bookish limits. The following passage is highly suggestive:

Learning has been divested of the peculiarities of a college dress that she might mix in polite assemblies, and be admitted to domestic familiarity, but by this means she has been confounded with ignorance and levity. Those who before could distinguish her only by the singularity of her garb cannot now distinguish her at all: and whenever she asserts the dignity of her character, she has reason to fear that ridicule which is inseparably connected with the remembrance of her dress; she is therefore in danger of being driven back to the college, where, such is her transformation, she may be at last refused admittance: for instead of learning's having elevated conversation, conversation has degraded learning; and the barbarous and inaccurate manner in which an extemporary speaker expresses a hasty conception is now contended to be the rule by which an author should write. . . . I am of opinion that with this view Swift wrote his "Polite Conversation"; and where he has plucked up a weed, the writers who succeed him should endeavour to plant a flower. With this view . . . it is hoped that our fashionable conversation will no longer be the disgrace of rational beings; and that men of genius and literature will not give the sanction of their example to popular folly, and suffer their evenings to pass in hearing or telling the exploits of a pointer, discussing a method to prevent wines from being pricked, or solving a difficult case in backgammon.[1]

From one point of view these words are a striking testimony to the triumph of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. The ideal of politeness, upheld by Addison before the Clubs and Assemblies of London, had penetrated into the country, and was now recognised as a common standard of good-breeding in all parts of English society. But though Addison had insisted on the study of good

[1] *Adventurer*, No. 139.

literature as an essential element of national well-being, his main object in *The Spectator* was the refinement of morals and manners. His endeavours had been successful: a rational Public Opinion was now easily brought to bear everywhere on the conduct of individuals; when, however, society settled down into the new order, its basis was always in process of being dissolved by the forces of intellectual indolence and natural decay. On the other hand, the curiosity of active minds, ever in pursuit of new things, gave constant encouragement to the licence claimed by adventurous writers. Literary judgments in the court of Public Opinion were therefore constructed out of three authorities: the opinion of the learned critics, who were acquainted with the traditional law of Literature, handed down with all its glosses from the times of Aristotle; that of the assertors of unlimited liberty for the individual inventor; and that of the General Reader, a tolerant but somewhat lazy judge, whose common sense was on the whole exerted to discourage absurdities, but who, desiring above all things to be amused, had usually a tenderness for the extravagance of literary or artistic dissent.

A superficial knowledge of the principles of criticism having been widely propagated through society by means of the Essay writers, the next step was to create a court of Professional Critics, who, in anonymous *Reviews* of books, advised the public of things deserving to be read. In 1749 appeared *The Monthly Review*, which described itself as "A Periodical work, giving an account with proper abstracts of, and extracts from, the New Books, pamphlets, etc., as they come out." This Review did not profess to guide opinion as to the merits of the different publications which it analysed, but it was followed in 1756 by *The Critical Review*, which, in the Preface to its first Volume, announced the character of its authors as follows:

> The judicious reader will observe that their aim has been to exhibit a succinct plan of every performance; to point out the most striking beauties and glaring defects; to illustrate their remarks with proper quotations, and to convey these remarks in

such a manner as might best conduce to the entertainment of the public.

As variety is the soul of such entertainments, and the confined nature of their plan would not admit of minute investigation, they have endeavoured to discover and disclose that criterion by which the character of a work may at once be distinguished, without dragging the reader through a tedious, cold, inanimated disquisition, which may be termed a languid paraphrase rather than a spirited criticism.

Both Reviews were exclusively literary, though the writers in them did not disguise their political opinions. Johnson, in his conversation with George III., said that the *Monthly* Reviewers were "enemies of the Church"; but at a dinner at Thrale's, described by Boswell, he allowed that both Reviews did their work impartially:

"The Monthly Reviewers," said he, "are not Deists; but they are Christians with as little Christianity as may be; and are for pulling down all establishments. The Critical Reviewers are for supporting the Constitution both in Church and State. The Critical Reviewers, I believe, often review without reading the books through; but lay hold of a topic, and write chiefly from their own minds. The Monthly Reviewers are duller men, and are glad to read the books through." [1]

To keep clear of the field of politics was easy enough for men of letters in the merely factious conflicts of the first half of George III.'s reign. But as opinion became heated at the outbreak of the French Revolution, the political atmosphere gradually penetrated the minds of the Reviewers, and long-suppressed partisanship began to find expression in their literary judgments. A good example of this is to be found in *The Monthly Review* for April 1793 and following numbers, which, in a criticism of Godwin's *Political Justice*, illustrates at once its adherence to its own declared method of merely analysing the contents of a book, and Johnson's remark about its preference for non-Christian principles:

"It may well be doubted," says the Reviewer, "whether, at any period since the fatal contest between Charles I. and his parliament, the minds of men have been so much awakened to

[1] Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (Croker's Edition), p. 504.

political inquiry as they are at this moment. If the well-being of society may be said to depend on the progress of political knowledge, it will follow that nothing is so desirable as the earnest pursuit of this inquiry: and what indeed can so effectually promote the peace and welfare of society as knowledge, etc.? . . . For these reasons we have no small degree of pleasure in announcing the present work to our readers as one which, from the freedom of its inquiry, the grandeur of its views, and the fortitude of its principles, is eminently deserving of attention. . . .

"The farther we proceed in our examination of this bold and original work, the more we are convinced that it is proper, for this particular period, to present our readers with as clear an analysis of its contents as the nature of our publication will allow, rather than to obtrude any decided opinion of our own. The minds of men are at present so agitated, and their principles are unfortunately so opposite, that we think it our *duty* thus to limit ourselves, and to suffer each reader to draw his own conclusions."

Considering that national enthusiasm had been heated "at this period" to boiling-point by Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*, such a recommendation of revolutionary principles under the veil of dispassionate "Inquiry" speaks volumes as to the truth of Canning's satire on the "new" Virtues of Philanthropy and Candour By insensible degrees party spirit permeated the whole body of periodical literature. The uncompromising temper of *The Anti-Jacobin* precluded its Reviewers from making any attempt at literary criticism on abstract principles, and their witty satire has an exclusively ethical basis But in 1802 a new departure was made. The founders of *The Edinburgh Review* aimed at giving a survey of the whole intellectual state of society, political and literary, judged by a standard of what may be called philosophical Neo-Whiggism. Published in Edinburgh, the *Review* was maintained by the contributions of several clever young men, whose main object was to promote the fortunes of the most advanced section of the New Whigs, and in whose programme literary criticism was included mainly as a means of attracting the general public to study the advocacy of their political cause. At first the Reviewers, in judging of books, preserved the impartial tone praised by Johnson in the old literary periodicals; but after a time

the desire of titillating the public fancy led them into a habit of satirising authors, particularly when these gave any sign of sympathising with the politics of the opposite party.

The Editor of *The Edinburgh Review*, and its most representative critic, was Francis Jeffrey, a Scotch lawyer, who combined in his temper political and literary inclinations, inherited from the Revolution of 1688, with the doctrinaire habit prevalent among the philosophers of the French Revolution. He possessed all the political party spirit and literary smartness of the authors of *The Rolliad.* At the same time his legal training, as well as his editorial experience, showed him the necessity of guiding the public taste in the direction he desired, by adopting some apparently authoritative standard of aesthetic judgment; and the standard which he eventually erected was characterised by the oligarchical exclusiveness of the faction to which he belonged. He so far followed the national tendency to freedom of opinion as to keep his edicts clear of the classical "Rules"; he proclaimed his admiration for the Elizabethan dramatists, and professed only a qualified approval of the style of Dryden and Pope. It would be possible, he thought, for the modern poet to invent a manner of writing which should combine the virtues and avoid the faults of English poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—a belief which, as we shall see, was also shared by Coleridge.[1] But he made no attempt to fortify his position by historical reasoning, and in point of fact the critical doctrines of himself and his assistants in *The Edinburgh Review* merely reflected the intuitions of a somewhat narrow common sense. His character as a critic is well estimated by Mr. Saintsbury:

> Jeffrey is no mere English La Harpe, as some think: he does not exemplify the Neo-Classical "Thorough," the rigour of the Rule, after the fashion which makes that remarkable person so interesting. On the contrary, he is only the last and most noteworthy instance of that mainly Neo-Classic inconsistency which we pointed out and on which we dwelt in the last volume.

[1] See pp. 202-3.

Except that he looks backward more than forward, Jeffrey often reminds us rather of Marmontel. He has inherited to the fullest extent the by this time ingrained English belief that canons of criticism which exclude or depreciate Shakespeare and Milton "will never do," as he might have said himself: but he has not merely inherited, he has expanded and supplemented it. He has not the least objection to the new school of students and praisers of those other Elizabethan writers, compared with whom Shakespeare would have seemed to La Harpe almost a regular dramatist, and quite a sane and orderly person. He has a strong admiration for Ford. He will follow a safe fellow-Whig like Campbell in admiring such an extremely anti-"classical" thing as Chamberlayne's *Pharonnida*. He uses about Dryden and Pope language not very different from Mr. Arnold's, and he is quite enthusiastic (though of course with some funny metrical qualms) about Cowper.[1]

The foregoing sketch of the progress of critical opinion in England will enable the reader to perceive how closely analogous were the effects produced by the expansion of Liberty in the distinct spheres of politics and literature. The Old Whigs, the chief authors of the Revolution of 1688, had helped to form a body of constitutional principle and practice, based entirely on English experience, which, in theory at least, was accepted as the gospel of the party up to the eve of the French Revolution. The latter event brought about a rupture, when the cosmopolitan principles of Liberty by which it was inspired were adopted by Fox as a natural development of the Whig doctrine.

Similarly, after the Revolution of 1688, the standard of classical authority had been acknowledged both by Whig and Tory writers as the Supreme Court of Appeal in questions of Taste: Addison had taken its decisions as the basis of his critical Essays in *The Spectator*, and Pope had declared in his *Essay on Criticism*:

> Those Rules of old discovered, not devised,
> Are Nature still, though Nature methodised

This "Old Whig" doctrine (as it may be called) in literature prevailed through the first half of the eighteenth

[1] *History of Criticism*, vol. iii pp 289-90.

exhibit its influence on the eve of the French Revolution. Perhaps its earliest monument is to be found in the poetry of the Della Crusca school; but more respectable results were soon produced in the higher sphere of literature; and the various tendencies of the transition from Classic to Romantic mannerism are characteristically reflected in the work of the three poets whose names stand at the head of this chapter. All of them were, in one sense or another, closely associated with the political opinions of the New Whig party. Two of them were men genuinely inspired: the third, whom, as the senior, I shall notice first, though devoid of original power, was so prominent a member of the lettered society of the time, that his poetry has from this circumstance acquired an historical position to which on its own merits it would scarcely be entitled.

Samuel Rogers was born at Newington Green on the 16th July 1763. He was the son of a banker, and belonged by family connection to that hereditary circle of Nonconformists which, as I have said in the biographical notice of Isaac Watts, had long congregated in the neighbourhood of London.[1] On his mother's side he was related to the Nonconformist divines, Philip and Matthew Henry, and his family was on terms of close friendship with Dr. Price, whose writings, the object of Burke's denunciation, carried weight with the Dissenters at the outset of the French Revolution. He was educated in the Nonconformist's favourite school at Newington Green. Though desirous of being ordained as a preacher, he yielded to his father's wish that he should enter the Bank; but in the midst of business he never ceased to cultivate the taste for literature which he had exhibited, as early as his eighteenth year, in an Essay written for *The Gentleman's Magazine*. In 1786 he published a volume of poems, most of which were imitations of the styles of Gray and Goldsmith. This was followed in 1792 by the work with which his name is chiefly associated, *The Pleasures of Memory*. His Muse then remained silent till

[1] Vol v p 329.

the appearance in 1798 of his *Epistle to a Friend.* In 1803 he moved to a house in St. James's Square, ceasing all active work as a banker, and amusing himself for the most part with the collection of objects of art. Hitherto his poetry had followed the orthodox lines of eighteenth century didactic poetry, but in his *Voyage of Columbus*, published in 1812, he adopted a semi-romantic manner of epic narrative; while in *Jacqueline*, a narrative poem which appeared in company with Byron's *Lara* (1814), the influence of Scott's octosyllabic verse is very apparent. *Human Life*, a didactic poem resembling *The Pleasures of Memory*, reverts to the manner of the couplet, with such variations as are noticed by Macaulay in his *Essay on Byron*. This was published in 1819. *Italy*, the first part of which appeared in 1821, is a series of isolated descriptions of Swiss scenery and Italian towns, written in blank verse. As the sale of this volume was slow, Rogers resolved to quicken it by the aid of a sister art, and the illustrations of Turner and Stothard, on which the poet spent £15,000, procured for the book a popularity that recalls the satirical reflection of Pope on Quarles' illustrated Book of Emblems: "Quarles is saved by beauties not his own." The second part of *Italy* did not appear till 1834; it was the last work of the author, who, however, did not die till the 18th of December 1855, in the ninety-third year of his age.

Rogers, though he took no active part in politics, lived mainly in company with the New Whigs, and reflected their opinions. He was on terms of intimate familiarity with Fox, whom he celebrates in his verses *Written in Westminster Abbey, October 10, 1806*—evidently inspired by Tickell's Elegy on Addison—and to whose retreat at St. Anne's he alludes in *Human Life*. He was also a frequent guest at Holland House, where he became acquainted with all the prominent men of letters of the time. His poetry, founded on the classical style of the eighteenth century, but obviously affected by the romantic atmosphere surrounding him, presents an analogy to the inherited political principles of the

Whigs tempered by French cosmopolitan sentiment. The leading qualities in his intellect are taste and refinement. He says of himself in the closing lines of his *Italy*:

> Nature denied him much
> But gave him at his birth what most he values,
> A passionate love for music, sculpture, painting,
> For poetry the language of the gods,
> For all things here, or grand or beautiful,
> A setting sun, a lake among the mountains,
> The light of an ingenuous countenance,
> And what transcends them all, a noble action.

Byron, describing him, says:

> Rogers is silent,—and, it is said, severe. When he does talk he talks well; and on all subjects of taste, his delicacy of expression is as pure as his poetry If you enter his house—his drawing-room—his library—you of yourself say this is not the dwelling of a common mind. There is not a gem, a coin, a book thrown aside on his chimney-piece, his sofa, his table, which does not bespeak an almost fastidious elegance in the possessor.[1]

Byron admired this fastidiousness, as illustrated in Rogers' poetry. "I called Crabbe and Sam," says he, "the fathers of present poetry; and said that I thought—except them—*all* of '*us youth*' were on a wrong tack."[2] And speaking of *The Pleasures of Memory* he declares: "His elegance is really wonderful—there is no such thing as a vulgar line in his book."[3] He was, in fact, prejudiced in favour of Rogers by his critical appreciation of the old classical school of poetry. The negative "purity" which he found in him was really only insipidity. Rogers' undoubted "taste" was not a quality of sufficient force to revive a class of metrical composition that had lost its vitality. His *Pleasures of Memory* shows a delicate perception of what is characteristic in other men's styles (just as he could appreciate the essential beauty of a gem or a coin), but little capacity for stamping his own life on his conceptions by vigour of thought and feeling. The first and best part of the poem is an echo of *The Deserted Village*; even this, however, is entirely lacking

[1] Diary, November 22, 1813. [2] Letter to Moore, February 2, 1818
[3] Letter to Moore, September 5, 1813

in the pathetic touches of nature that give so much character to Goldsmith's original.[1] After about one hundred and fifty lines of personal recollection, Rogers proceeds to reason on his subject generally, and diverges into the manner of Pope:

> Survey the globe, each ruder realm explore;
> From Reason's faintest ray to Newton soar.
> What different spheres to human bliss assigned!
> What slow gradations in the scale of mind!
> Yet mark in each these mystic wonders wrought;
> Oh! mark the sleepless energies of thought.

When, however, we look for illustrations of these "sleepless energies," we are put off with a series of commonplace examples of Memory, strung together after the fashion of Darwin's irrelevant similes in *The Loves of the Plants*.[2] "The adventurous boy," leaving his native village, weeps as he remembers the days of his childhood. "*So*, when the mild Tupia" embarked to explore the wonders of Eastern civilisation

> He breathed his firm yet fond adieu
> Borne from his leafy hut, his carved canoe.

"*So* Scotia's Queen . . . gazed her soul away," as the shores of France receded from her view, while

> Young Ammon, when he sought
> Where Ilium stood and where Pelides fought,
> Sate at the helm himself;

as to which allusion we are bidden in a note to think "with what feelings the scholar of Aristotle must have approached the ground described by Homer in that poem which had been his delight from his childhood, and which records the achievements of him from whom he claimed his descent."

Human Life shows the same tendency to compose a poem by making a patchwork of platitudes: it is the production of a tasteful mind, cultivated by much reading,

[1] It is characteristic of the incoherence of Rogers' mode of poetical conception that, after arousing pity by the pathos of his description of the home of his childhood, lying ruined and roofless, he goes on to describe his feelings on seeing in it again the old objects of luxury, *furniture*, *screens*, *clocks*, etc.

[2] See p. 37 and p. 143.

but devoid of inspiration.[1] In his longest poem, *The Voyage of Columbus*, Rogers claims a certain originality of epic construction, by making his narrative "sudden in its transitions and full of historical allusions, leaving much to be imagined by the reader." What the poem really illustrates is the inability of the poet to sustain a long flight of continuous thought: his "historical allusions" are put together piecemeal, and the supernatural machinery, which is intended to give the history epic dignity, is a crude imitation of Tasso's not very successful introduction of daemonic agency in *Gerusalemme Liberata*. *The Voyage of Columbus*, however, possesses interest for the historian, as furnishing evidence of the progress made by the romantic movement in effecting a transition from the old classical models. While the framework of the poem is evidently suggested by Scott's example in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, the fragmentary character of the narrative seems to have furnished Byron with an excuse for the incoherent style of *The Giaour*. In *Italy* the detached character of the various sketches relieves the poet from the necessity of developing a connected plan; on the other hand, the absence from these of any central vigour of imaginative thought makes it difficult to see why metre should have been chosen as the vehicle of expression. If individuality can be found anywhere in Rogers' verse (which is doubtful), it is in his *Epistle to a Friend*, where he follows—though in a more pompous style—the precedent of Pomfret's *Choice*, and appears, in the concluding lines, to be presenting to the reader a portrait of himself:

> If when this roof shall know thy friend no more,
> Some, formed like thee, should once, like thee, explore;
> Invoke the lares of his loved retreat,
> And his lone walks imprint with pilgrim feet;

[1] There is a curious illustration of Rogers' unconscious plagiarism in a note to this poem on the line beginning, "Then is the Age of Admiration," in which he transfers almost *verbatim* from Johnson's *Life* of Pope the following reflection: "Who does not wish that Dante and Dryden could have known the value of the homage that was paid them, and have foreseen the greatness of their young admirers?"

Then, be it said (as, vain of better days,
Some grey domestic prompts the partial praise),
"Unknown he lived, unenvied, not unblest;
Reason his guide, and Happiness his guest.
In the clear mirror of his moral page,
We trace the manners of a purer age.
His soul, with thirst of genuine glory fraught,
Scorned the false lustre of licentious thought.
—One fair asylum from the world he knew,
One chosen seat, that charms with various view!
Who boasts of more (believe the serious strain)
Sighs for a home, and sighs, alas! in vain.
Thro' each he roves, the tenant of a day,
And, with the swallow, wings his life away."

A much larger measure of genius and vitality is found in the poetry of Campbell, who in many of his tastes and associations resembled Rogers. Like him he had politically strong Whig leanings, and like him his conceptions of poetry were firmly based on antecedent eighteenth-century traditions. But in respect of temperament and character there was a wide interval between them; and while Campbell fell short of Rogers in the methodical regularity of his literary composition, he greatly surpassed him in the poetical inspiration which has given his best work an unique place in English literature.

Thomas Campbell was born on the 27th July 1777 in Glasgow, where his father, who was engaged in the Virginia trade, had a house of business. Thomas was the youngest of a large family, which was at the time of his birth in needy circumstances, his father having lost his fortune in consequence of the revolt of the American colonies. In 1785 the boy was sent to the *Grammar* School in Glasgow. From 1791 to 1796 he studied in the University of the same city, and distinguished himself by his translations from the Greek Classics. His earliest finished verses, "When Jordan hushed his waters still," were the work of 1795. In 1799 appeared *The Pleasures of Hope*, and in the same volume were included *The Wounded Hussar*, *Gilderoy*, *The Harper*, and *Elegy on Love and Madness*. *The Pleasures of Hope* at once secured for the author a position of mark among the poets

of the day, but though he had been for some little time seeking literary employment in Edinburgh, where he had made the acquaintance of Jeffrey, Walter Scott, Brougham, and others, Campbell did not at once pursue his success, but travelled for some time, rather aimlessly, in Germany. He was at Altona when the Battle of Hohenlinden was fought on the 3rd of December 1800, and in Germany were written *Ye Mariners of England*, published in *The Morning Chronicle* of March 1801, and the *Lines on Leaving a Scene in Bavaria*, which have a touch of the romantic introspection and love of solitude that Rousseau's writings had made fashionable. Recalled to Scotland in the same year by the death of his father, he engaged himself from 1801 to 1803 in different kinds of hack-work. On the 10th of September in the latter year he married his cousin, Matilda Sinclair, and soon afterwards published a new edition of *The Pleasures of Hope*, including in the same volume *Lines Written on Visiting a Scene in Argyleshire*, *Ode to Winter*, *The Beech Tree's Petition*, *The Soldier's Dream*, *Stanzas to Painting*, *The Exile of Erin*, *Lochiel*, and *Hohenlinden*. To Walter Scott in 1805 he sent on the 27th March the first draft of *The Battle of the Baltic*, calling it *The Battle of Copenhagen*; in the same year he undertook for the booksellers his *Specimens of English Poetry*; these, however, were not published till 1818. He was at this time in considerable financial difficulty, from which he was only partially relieved by the grant of a pension of £200 from Fox's Ministry. *Gertrude of Wyoming*, planned in 1807, was published in 1809, together with *Ye Mariners of England*, *The Battle of the Baltic*, *Lord Ullin's Daughter*, and *O'Connor's Child*. Fastidious and indolent, Campbell, after the appearance of this volume, produced little more poetry; the most important of his later verse-compositions being *Lines on a Rainbow* (1819), *Song of Roland* (1820), *The Last Man* (1823), *Theodric*, *Ritter Bann*, *Reullura*, and *A Dream* (1824). Another reprint of his poems with a few additions, consisting mainly of verses connected with the Polish insurrection of 1830-31, was issued

in 1836; and his last work, *The Pilgrim of Glencoe*, appeared in 1842.

His reputation with the public always remained high. From his home in Sydenham, where he settled in 1804, he mixed freely with the literary society of the day, and came frequently as a welcome guest to Holland House. His Lectures on Poetry, delivered in 1812 at the Royal Institution, were very successful. He took a leading part in the founding of London University, and, in 1826, received what he considered the crowning honour of his life, in being elected Lord Rector of Glasgow University, a tribute to his fame by his countrymen which was twice repeated. In his latter years his health gave way: he retired to Boulogne, and died there on the 15th June 1844. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

The expansion of imaginative taste at the opening of the nineteenth century is vividly reflected in the character of Campbell's poetry. He himself was by instinct and conviction a literary Conservative. Byron, noting this tendency in his poetry, ranks him in his "triangular *Gradus ad Parnassum*,"[1] on the same plane with Moore—both of them being placed below Rogers, and all three below Walter Scott, but above Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Campbell, in his *Essay on English Poetry*, undertook the defence of Pope against Bowles; nevertheless he was far from attempting a servile reproduction of the style of the poet whom he acknowledged as his master, and for this "liberalism" he is blamed, theoretically, by Byron, who says:

> With regard to poetry in general I am convinced, the more I think of it, that he [Moore] and *all* of us—Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, Moore, Campbell—are all in the wrong, one as much as another; that we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system, or systems, not worth a damn in itself, and from which none but Rogers and Crabbe are free.[2]

Two sentiments predominate in Campbell's verse, a fervent love of his native soil, and an enthusiasm for

[1] *Byron's Works* (John Murray, 1898), *Letters and Journals*, vol. ii. p. 344.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. iv. p. 169.

political liberty; and with these is mixed a strong element of religious feeling. His patriotism is as ardent as that of Scott, but it is not associated with the passionate love of wild nature, historic tradition, and romantic adventure, which inspired the author of *Guy Mannering* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. His love of country shows itself rather in a preference for the tender affections and memories of home life. He muses before the ruined home of his ancestors in Argyleshire: Gertrude of Wyoming dreams over the

> Land of my father's love, my mother's birth,
> The home of kindred I have never seen:

the exile of Erin "revisits in dreams" its "sea-beaten shore"; and the soldier, sleeping on a foreign battle-field tells how—also in dreams—returning

> To the home of my fathers that welcomed me back,
>
> I flew to the pleasant fields, traversed so oft,
> In life's morning march when my bosom was young;
> I heard my own mountain-goats bleating aloft,
> And knew the sweet strain that the corn-reapers sung.

But in the glowing atmosphere of contemporary battle and victory this softness is often exchanged for the lofty lyric march of poems like *The Battle of the Baltic* and *Ye Mariners of England*; while the political Whig traditions of the Campbell clan are expanded into that sympathy with the cause of national independence which, after the first Reform Bill, became one of the features of English Liberalism. The uprising of Poland, celebrated by Campbell in the first of his famous poems, *The Pleasures of Hope* (1798), continued to be sung by him as late as 1831. Inspirations of liberty in Ireland, Germany, Spain, Greece, by turns awoke an answering chord in his imagination. Even in India the commercial misdoings of the English inspired him (doubtless moved by traditional Whig antipathy to Warren Hastings) with a somewhat visionary forecast:

> To pour redress on India's injured realm,
> The oppressor to dethrone, the proud to whelm;

> To chase Destruction from her plundered shore,
> With arts and arms that triumphed once before,
> The tenth Avatar comes! at Heaven's command
> Shall Seriswattee wave her hallowed wand!
> And Camdeo bright, and Ganesa sublime,
> Shall bless with joy their own propitious clime!

The religious note prevailing in his poetry indicates antagonism to the materialist tendencies of Physical Science, a feeling shared by Wordsworth and Keats. It is sounded in *The Rainbow*:—

> When Science from Creation's face
> Enchantment's veil withdraws,
> What lovely visions yield their place
> To cold material laws!—

and is strikingly emphasised both in the fine passage, first inserted in the second edition of *The Pleasures of Hope*, beginning "Oh deep enchanting prelude to repose," and in *The Last Man*, written in 1823.

To a man of genius, imbued with the spirit of classical literature, there was no difficulty in expanding the metrical tradition of the eighteenth century, refined as it had been, in the earlier half of that period, by colloquial usage, so as to make it a fitting vehicle of expression for simple elementary emotions of this kind. Campbell had always an admirable instinct of what was appropriate in poetry. His fastidious taste and judgment make what he says of Parnell generally applicable to himself: "His poetry is like a flower that has been trained and planted by the skill of the gardener, but which preserves in its cultured state the natural fragrance of its wilder air."[1] The careful study of "correct" expression, which marks him for a disciple in the school of Pope, Parnell, and Goldsmith, bore fruit in the considerable number of his lines which have become part of the quotable stock of our national poetry. "'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view": "Like angels' visits, few and far between":[2] "The torrent's smoothness ere it dash below": "Coming events cast their shadows before": "The sentinel stars set

[1] See vol. v. p. 189.
[2] Borrowed, however, from Blair's *Grave*.

their watch in the sky"; with other phrases of the same kind, are "familiar in our mouths as household words," and bear testimony to Campbell's gift for combining brilliant imagery with epigrammatic diction.

This faculty was not reached by him at a bound. *The Pleasures of Hope*, in the first edition, reads like the work of a clever schoolboy, seeking to imitate the elegant sentimentalism of Rogers and the sonorous pomp of Darwin. The following is a characteristic specimen of its thought and language:

> Hark! the wild maniac sings, to chide the gale,
> That wafts so slow her lover's distant sail;
> She, sad spectatress, on the wintry shore,
> Watched the rude surge his shroudless corse that bore,
> Knew the pale form, and, shrieking in amaze,
> Clasped her cold hands, and fixed her maddening gaze:
> Poor widowed wretch! 'twas there she wept in vain,
> Till memòry fled her agonising brain;
> But Mercy gave, to charm the sense of woe,
> Ideal peace, that truth could ne'er bestow;
> Warm on her heart the joys of Fancy beam,
> And aimless Hope delights her darkest dream.

To rank the delusions of madness among the conscious *Pleasures of Hope* shows a feebleness of thought which is unfortunately apparent in Campbell's other illustrations of his theme. Nor, though two of the often-quoted lines mentioned above occur in *The Pleasures of Hope*, can the style of this youthful poem compare for a moment, in point of correct expression, with the pregnant art of Pope, when writing up to his true level, or with the chaste simplicity of Goldsmith. Campbell is often satisfied with the selection of words, which fail clearly to express his meaning, and leave the thought vague and obscure, *e.g.*:

> *And mark the wretch whose wanderings never knew*
> The world's regard, that soothes though half-untrue,
> Whose erring heart the lash of sorrow bore,
> But found not pity when it erred no more—

or which altogether misrepresent it, as:

> Yes! there are hearts, prophetic HOPE may trust,
> That slumber yet in *uncreated* dust;

(where he means, not that the dust is uncreated, but that there are hearts not yet created out of dust) and:

> Chide not his peace, proud Reason! nor destroy
> The shadowy forms of uncreated joy,

(where "uncreated" is used for "unsubstantial")

> That *urge* the lingering tide of life, and pour
> Spontaneous slumber on his midnight hour;

(where "urge" is apparently only used because "quicken" would not suit the metre).

On the other hand, in the later editions of the poem we find the following admirable passage on the destructive tendencies of Science, which, in its strength and lucidity, is worthy to rank with Dryden's translation from Lucretius:

> Are these the pompous tidings ye proclaim,
> Lights of the world and demi-gods of Fame?
> Is this your triumph—this your proud applause,
> Children of Truth, and champions of her cause?
> For this hath Science searched on weary wing,
> By shore and sea, each mute and living thing?
> Launched with Iberia's pilot from the steep,
> To worlds unknown, and isles beyond the deep?
> Or round the cope her living chariot driven,
> And wheeled in triumph through the signs of Heaven?
> Oh! star-eyed Science, hast thou wandered there,
> To waft us home the message of despair?
> Then bind the palm, thy sage's brow to suit,
> Of blasted leaf and death-distilling fruit!
> Ah me! the laurelled wreath that Murder rears,
> Blood-nursed, and watered by the widow's tears,
> Seems not so foul, so tainted, and so dread,
> As waves the night-shade round the sceptic's head.
> What is the bigot's torch, the tyrant's chain?
> I smile on death, if heavenward HOPE remain!
> But if the warring winds of Nature's strife
> Be all the faithless charter of my life,
> If Chance awaked, inexorable power,
> This frail and feverish being of an hour,
> Doomed o'er the world's precarious scene to sweep,
> Swift as the tempest travels on the deep,
> To know Delight but by her parting smile,
> And toil, and wish, and weep, a little while;

Then melt, ye elements, that formed in vain
This troubled pulse and visionary brain!
Fade, ye wild flowers, memorials of my doom,
And sink, ye stars, that light me to the tomb!
Truth, ever lovely,—since the world began
The foe of tyrants, and the friend of man,—
How can thy words from balmy slumber start
Reposing Virtue, pillowed on the heart!
Yet, if thy voice the note of thunder rolled,
And that were true which Nature never told,
Let Wisdom smile not on her conquered field;
No rapture dawns, no treasure is revealed!
Oh! let her read, nor loudly, nor elate,
The doom that bars us from a better fate;
But sad as angels for the good man's sin,
Weep to record, and blush to give it in!

The Pleasures of Hope, in its frequent use of Abstraction and Personification, exhibits all the features of the didactic poetry of the eighteenth century; but in his later poems, notably *Ye Mariners of England*, *Hohenlinden*, and *The Battle of the Baltic*, Campbell discards these mannerisms and develops a style of his own that reflects the best and purest social idiom of the age. It would be hard to find any short poem in the English language that contains so many elements of the sublime as *Hohenlinden* In eight stanzas the poet, by a series of master-strokes, has called up a living picture of conflict between two vast armies. It is a typical description of the soldiers' battles of the early French Revolution, in which individual leadership disappears amidst the rush of national passions, and the successive acts of the bloody drama are indicated by images rather of the changing aspects of Nature than of the deliberate purposes of Man. The grand view in the opening stanza of the tranquil snow-clad waste traversed by the dark and rapid river; the sudden burst of the drum-beat on the stillness of the night; the muster of the horsemen, "by torch and trumpet fast arrayed"; the thunder of heaven mingling in the dark with the roar of the artillery; the gradual change of the prevailing hue in the landscape from snow-white to blood-red; the confused shouts of the combatants shrouded "in their sulphurous

canopy," impenetrable to the rays of the rising sun; the fiery exhortation to the chivalry of Munich for a supreme effort; and at last the solemn silence of the field of conflict strown with the bodies of the dead;—all these details, presented in words of which the picturesque colour is intensified by the swiftness of the metrical motion, combine to form a poetical battle-piece unequalled in the literature of the world.

Scarcely less skill in the selection and combination of metrical words is shown in *The Battle of the Baltic*, a composition in which patriotic emotion lifts the imagination of poet and reader into a still loftier atmosphere. Fine judgment, a quality in Campbell no less conspicuous than poetic impulse, is shown in the changes made in the structure of this poem. As at first written it consisted of twenty-seven stanzas, of which the following is a sample:

Of Nelson and the North
    Sing the day,
When, their haughty powers to vex,
He engaged the Danish decks,
And with twenty floating wrecks
    Crowned the fray.

When his poem was completed, Campbell perceived that, while it contained many fine lines, it was defective alike in the unbalanced form of the stanza and in its multiplicity of prosaic and superfluous details. He accordingly retrenched his imagery, while he amplified his metrical architecture, by prefixing four alternately rhyming lines to the two first lines of the stanza, as originally built, and running these two together in the fifth. The words printed in italics in the following transcript of the poem, as it now stands, show how much of it has been introduced from the original draft:

I

Of Nelson and the North,
Sing the glorious day's renown,
When to battle fierce came forth
All the might of Denmark's crown,

And her *arms* along the deep *proudly shone,—*
By each gun the lighted brand,
In a bold determined hand,
And the Prince of all the land
Led them on.

II

Like leviathans afloat,[1]
Lay their bulwarks on *the brine;*
While the sign of battle flew
On the lofty British line:
It was ten of April[2] *morn by the chime:*
As they drifted on their path,
There was silence deep as death;
And the boldest held his breath
For a time.

III

But the might of England flushed
To anticipate the scene;
And her van the fleeter rushed
O'er the deadly space between.
"Hearts of oak!"[3] our captains cried; when *each gun*
From its adamantine lips
Spread a death-shade round the ships,
Like the *hurricane eclipse*
Of the sun

IV

Again! again! again!
And the havoc did not slack,
Till a feeble cheer the Dane
To our cheering sent us back:
Their shots along the deep *slowly boom;*
Then *ceased—and all is wail,*
As they strike the shattered sail,
Or, in conflagration pale,
Light the gloom.

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[1] This line was transferred bodily from the fifth stanza of the original draft. It will be observed that it does not rhyme with the third line of the above version. Campbell doubtless meant to write "Like leviathans in view," but forgot to make the alteration.

[2] In the original "Thursday"

[3] In the original "bands of music" are made to play "Hearts of Oak" at the close of the battle.

Scene in Bavaria, the reflection and versification of that fine poem are much more akin to Gray's style in his *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, than to any autobiographic composition of Wordsworth or Byron.

Campbell had no gift for narrative. *Gertrude of Wyoming* in respect of its representation of action and character is third-rate, and, even in its descriptive passages, the author's preference for classical generalisation is reflected in the conventionality of his landscape. As Byron said of the poem: "It has no more locality in common with Pennsylvania than with Penmanmaur." *Theodric* is an attempt to breathe the spirit of romance into a rather tame story of real life: in *The Pilgrim of Glencoe*, on the other hand, a romantic situation of past times is described in verse modelled on the prosaic realism of Crabbe's *Tales*. Neither experiment is inspired by Campbell's natural genius: both are equally unsuccessful.

If Campbell had something in common with Rogers, he had more with the third poet named at the head of this chapter. Both had the same political sympathies, and sought to extend the Whig principle of Liberty beyond the limits of the English Constitution, so as to apply it to all communities struggling for any kind of national independence. Both were widely read in Greek and Latin literature, and in their own verse employed a direct and lucid form of diction, based immediately on the conversational usages of refined society. But the great diversity of their several temperaments produced a marked opposition in their styles. The Scottish poet, fastidious, reserved, diffident, was always inclined to check the exuberance of his poetical impulse by a severe standard of self-criticism: the Irishman, ardent, vain, and expansive, reflected every shade of opinion and sentiment in the brilliant society which admitted him to intimacy, without attempting to consider how far the tastes which he gratified were consistent with the enduring requirements of art.

[1] *Byron's Works* (Murray, 1901), *Letters and Journals*, v. 166.

Thomas Moore, the son of Garret Moore, a grocer of Dublin, was born in that city on the 28th May 1779. He was sent at an early age to the Grammar School, Dublin, under Thomas Whyte, and in 1794 was admitted to Trinity College, Dublin, where he distinguished himself by his classical attainments, and took a leading part in the counsels of the conspirators of 1798, though he dexterously avoided compromising himself to the same extent as his friend Robert Emmet. While at Trinity College he completed his translation of Anacreon, and, in 1799, having taken it over with him to London (whither he had gone to enrol himself as a member of the Middle Temple), dedicated it by permission to the Prince of Wales. Already known by the sweetness of his singing, he found no difficulty, under the patronage of Lord Moira, in obtaining entrance to the leading Whig coteries, and the popularity of his translation of Anacreon prepared the way for the publication, in 1801, of his *Poems, By the late Thomas Little*. A frequent guest at Lord Moira's seat, Donington Park, he obtained through his influence an appointment as Registrar of Bermuda in 1803. Thither he went in 1804, but, being soon tired of West Indian society, he returned to England in the same year, leaving a deputy to perform his duties. In 1806 he published his *Odes and Epistles*, which, being severely criticised by Jeffrey in *The Edinburgh Review*, occasioned the ineffective duel satirised by Byron in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. The publication of *Irish Melodies* was begun in 1807, and was continued at intervals up to 1834, the airs being arranged by Sir John Stevenson, and the words written by Moore *Corruption* and *Intolerance* were published in 1808, and were followed in 1809 by *The Sceptic; A Philosophical Satire*. When the Whig Ministry was formed in 1806, Moore expected to obtain some valuable appointment; but that Government fell before anything could be arranged, and his political hopes were finally extinguished in 1812, when his chief patron, Lord Moira, hitherto the Prince Regent's favourite adviser, was sent to India as Governor-General,

of his day. The petted darling of the Whig Opposition, he showed, like the author of *The Beggar's Opera*, a wonderful intuition as to the kind of intellectual fare which was suited to the fashionable demand of the moment, and an equal amount of skill in providing it. His subordinate relation to Byron resembles the intimacy between Gay and Pope. But his conduct was marked by a manly independence which honourably elevates his character above that of the "Hare with many friends."

His poetry from first to last reflects the qualities that manifest themselves in his translation of Anacreon, and the words in which he sums up the genius of that poet may be applied with little alteration to his own:

> If we omit those vices in our estimate which ethnic religion not only connived at but consecrated, we shall say that the disposition of our poet was amiable; his morality was relaxed, but not abandoned; and Virtue with her zone loosened may be an emblem of the character of Anacreon.[1]

His own amatory poems reflected the taste of a society, if more extended, scarcely less emasculate than that which welcomed the effusions of Della Crusca. Jeffrey's invective in *The Edinburgh Review* against his early *Odes and Epistles*, though certainly much more austere than the occasion required, is worth quoting, as showing what occasioned the duel between the poet and the critic.

> It seems to be his [Moore's] aim to impose corruption upon his readers, by concealing it under the mask of refinement; to reconcile them imperceptibly to the most vile and vulgar sensuality by blending its language with that of exalted feeling and tender emotion; and to steal impurity into their hearts, by gently perverting the most simple and generous of their affections. In the execution of this unworthy task he labours with a perseverance at once ludicrous and detestable. He may be seen in every page running round the paltry circle of his seductions with incredible zeal and anxiety, and stimulating his jaded fancy for new images of impurity, with as much melancholy industry as ever outcast of the Muses hunted for epithets or metre.[2]

[1] Introduction to *Odes of Anacreon*.
[2] *Edinburgh Review* for July 1806.

Had Moore developed the good sense which afterwards distinguished him, he would have refrained from publishing these crude and juvenile compositions. He had not yet discovered that the true principle for refining a lyric gift like his own was to associate it intimately with music. In the "Advertisement" to *National Airs, No. 1*, he says very happily:

A pretty air without words resembles one of those *half* creatures of Plato, which are described as wandering, in search of the remainder of themselves, through the world.

His own poetical genius fell in admirably with this principle:

"I only know," he says, "that in a strong and inborn feeling for music lies the source of whatever talent I may have shown for poetical composition, and that it was the effort to translate into language the emotions and passions which music appeared to me to express that first led to my writing poetry at all deserving of the name."[1]

We can see how much he gained in the way of refinement, by his union of poetry and music, when we compare any of his early amatory poems with the following charming lines, written to an "Old English Air":

Then fare thee well! my own dear love,
This world has now for us
No greater grief, no pain above
The pain of parting thus, dear love, the pain of parting thus!

Had we but known, since first we met,
Some few short hours of bliss,
We might, in numbering them, forget
The deep deep pain of this, dear love, the deep deep pain of this!

But no, alas! we've never seen
One glimpse of pleasure's ray,
But still there came some cloud between,
And chased it all away, dear love, and chased it all away!

Yet e'en could those sad moments last,
Far dearer to my heart
Were hours of grief, together past,
Than years of mirth apart, dear love, than years of mirth apart!

[1] *Moore's Poetical Works* (1841), Preface to vol. v.

political satires. Two dominant motives inspire him when he is serious, patriotism and religion. As an Irishman he sympathised with the rebellion of 1798, but his sentiment never amounted to a passion, like that of Emmet and others; and when he had once accustomed himself to the fashionable society of London, he showed little desire to return to his native country. While he adhered to the traditional forms of the faith in which he had been educated, he did so on the principles of a sceptic:

> Hail, modest ignorance! thou goal and prize,
> Thou last best knowledge of the humbly wise!
> Hail, sceptic ease! when error's waves are past,
> How sweet to reach thy tranquil port at last,
> And gently rocked in undulating doubt,
> Smile at the sturdy winds which war without![1]

It was easy for him, therefore, to accommodate his political and religious attitude to the views of the New Whigs, who attacked the Government for their alliance with the Absolutist party in Europe, and for their opposition to Catholic Emancipation in Ireland. To the Old Whigs, as the authors of the Test Acts which accompanied the Revolution of 1688, he was naturally hostile, and it was against the Portland section of the party—which in the early years of the nineteenth century was hastening to merge itself in the Tory ranks—that he directed what is probably the only well-known couplet of his early satires:

> But bees, on flowers alighting, cease their hum—
> So, settling upon places, Whigs grow dumb!

In these compositions—one of which is called *Corruption* and the other *Intolerance*—written after the downfall of the Grenville Government, he endeavours to assume the lofty moral air of Pope's political satire. The following invective against Castlereagh, for example, seems intended to cast into a poetical form alike a genuine sentiment of

[1] *The Sceptic.*

CHAPTER VI

ANTI-JACOBINISM IN ENGLISH POETRY

The Pursuits of Literature: Canning: Frere: Latin Poetry of *The Anti-Jacobin*

Opposition to the spirit of the French Revolution roused as fierce an enthusiasm in the body of the nation as abstract "liberal" theories evoked in the intellectual minority headed by the New Whigs. The leaders of the two historic parties perceived that their fundamental principles were threatened by it—the Old Whigs, in so far as it attacked the system of aristocratic government established by the Revolution of 1688; the Tories, inasmuch as they saw in the murder of Louis XVI. a desperate assault on all monarchical traditions. Moderate opinion throughout the country had at first been mildly in favour of what seemed to be a movement for the extension of constitutional freedom. Many hoped that the wider ideas of liberty embodied in the sentimental philosophy of Rousseau might find some expression in the political life of their own nation. But when the aggressive tendencies of the Revolutionary government fully revealed themselves, English public opinion was no longer satisfied with the policy of non-intervention hitherto steadily pursued by Pitt. Men perceived that their own national liberties were in danger. The house of Ucalegon was on fire, and the first necessity of his neighbours was to prevent the flames from spreading. Postponing their desire for Reform, Englishmen for the most part ranged themselves, in defence of the existing order of society, behind their natural leaders, who showed a corresponding spirit in

advancing against the national foe. The aristocracy shook off their dilettante tastes, and took up in the public cause the literary weapons of wit, satire, rhetoric, and philosophy, too long used mainly for the purposes of faction. The great arsenal to which they resorted for ammunition in this Anti-Jacobin movement was, of course, Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*.

Beyond any man of his time Burke was qualified to give an illuminating exposition of the principles at stake. His life had been spent in the service of the State, where he had acquired a profound knowledge of men and affairs. To the comprehensive view of the philosopher he added the glowing imagination of the orator and the poet. Above all, he was inspired by a passionate love of the English Constitution, which, as viewed on its historic side since the Revolution of 1688, seemed to him identical with aristocratic supremacy; and as the principle of aristocracy was the one mainly threatened by the French Revolution, it was in the defence of this point that he concentrated all the energies of his eloquence. His method of reasoning offers a striking contrast to that of the other great philosopher whom the course of events brought at last as a champion into the Anti-Jacobin camp. The arguments of Coleridge have always an air of paradoxical singularity. Whether he is advocating the cause of Revolution, as in *The Watchman*, or maintaining the opposite side, as in *The Friend*, his reasoning equally starts from some metaphysical and absolute base, and presents the principles of his party in a light derived entirely from his own mind. From Burke's political philosophy metaphysics are altogether excluded. The existence of things is with him the only needful axiom, and his chief arguments are derived from antiquity and experience. He relies on the common sense of his audience

"On these ideas," he says, "instead of quarrelling with establishments, as some do, who have made a philosophy and a religion of their hostility to such institutions, we cleave closely to them. We are resolved to keep an established church, an established monarchy, an established aristocracy, and an established

evident that he took the former for his model. Both poems contain a violent assault on the political and social corruption of the age. Both point their general invective with a multitude of personal allusions. In each case a certain unity is given to this multiplicity of detail, not only by the proposed subject, but also by the dominant personal animus of the author. But independently of the vast difference of genius in the two writers, Pope's design possessed one advantage that gave his satire a beauty of form wanting to the work of his disciple: he was the spokesman of an Opposition, whereas Mathias was the defender of a Government. Walpole's methods of parliamentary corruption were concrete evils, in attacking which it was easy to conceal personal rancour behind the splendour of moral declamation: Mathias' discovery of revolutionary tendencies in the multitude of books that he attacked too often seems to be inspired by private jealousy and dislike. The names of the persons assailed by Pope were all well known in the political warfare of the day; he does not shrink from making Royalty itself the object of his moral satire; but the crimes of the large majority of the victims whom Mathias drags forward for public execration could only have been known, even to contemporaries, by the information of his "Notes." The Notes in *The Pursuits of Literature* are for this reason deliberately made part of the Satire, and are defended by the precedent of Pope:

> However excellent, the work of any Satirist is transitory as to its immediate subject. But as it is a view of life designed to be presented to other times, as well as those in which it is written, the necessity of an author's furnishing Notes to his own composition is evident to clear up for himself such difficulties as the lapse of time (and indeed of a very little time) would unavoidably create. This is a privilege and a liberty which was denied to the ancients, which Dryden rejected, and Pope partially adopted.

Pope indeed did so on the advice of Swift; but he took care to give a mock-heroic air to his Notes on *The Dunciad* by feigning them to be the commentary of Martinus Scriblerus. Mathias' Notes, on the contrary, are seriously

didactic; being, in every case, intended either to elucidate the allusion, expand the moral, or intensify the satire of the text. Many of them have the character of sermons; and indeed throughout the satire the genuine enthusiasm of the author for the cause in which he is engaged is unmistakable—a quality which procured for him the high commendation of Canning in his *New Morality*:

> Thou too!—the nameless Bard,—whose honest zeal
> For law, for morals, for the public weal,
> Pours down impetuous on thy country's foes
> The stream of verse and many-languaged prose;
> Thou too!—though oft thy ill-advised dislike
> The guiltless herd with random censure strike,—
> Though quaint allusions vague and undefined,
> Play faintly round the ear, but mock the mind;—
> Through the mixed mass yet truth and learning shine,
> And manly vigour stamps the nervous line;
> And patriot warmth the generous rage inspires,
> And wakes and points the desultory fires.[1]

Mathias' satire, in spite of what he himself urges in behalf of its unity, suffers from its want of method. In his hurry of indignation the writer drives furiously, splashing the mud right and left on harmless passers-by, and lashing at whoever comes within his reach on the plea that he is obstructing the public way. Voracious in his reading, he makes an indiscriminate use of his learning, and seldom writes five lines together in his Notes without dragging in a quotation from some Greek, Latin, or Italian author, to emphasise his own moral. All this gives his poem an air of pedantry; at the same time, from its multitudinous personality, *The Pursuits of Literature* is a monument of great historical value, reviving in detail a period of vanished taste, so that the satirist has grounds for his boast that

> The present Poem was not composed for a trivial purpose, or without mature thought. It is the fruit and study of an independent and disinterested life, passed without the incumbrance of a profession or the embarrassment of business. It was not intended

[1] *Anti-Jacobin*: "New Morality."

Having thus heaped the ridicule of his varied irony on the arts by which the new revolutionary principles were being recommended to the imagination of the people, Canning concluded his enterprise by an earnest denunciation of the principles themselves. *New Morality* is a serious satire, conceived in a lofty and impassioned spirit. Opening with an appeal to the patriotism of the English youth, the poet adjures them to clear their mind of cant, and consider the real dangers by which the Constitution of their country was being threatened:

> If Vice appal thee,—if thou view with awe
> Insults that brave, and crimes that scape the law;
> Yet may the specious bastard brood, which claim
> A spurious homage under Virtue's name,
> Sprung from that parent of ten thousand crimes,
> The *New Philosophy* of modern times,—
> Yet, these may rouse thee.—With unsparing hand,
> Oh, lash the vile impostures from the land.

One by one "the bastard brood" of so-called Virtues are then dragged into the light, and stripped of the disguises in which they masquerade. Philanthropy, Sensibility, Justice, Candour are made to exhibit their real natures, in a style of which the satire on Sensibility may be taken as an example:

> Sweet child of sickly Fancy!—her of yore
> From her loved France Rousseau to exile bore;
> And, while midst lakes and mountains wild he ran,
> Full of himself, and shunned the haunts of man,
> Taught her, o'er each lone vale and Alpine steep,
> To lisp the story of his wrongs, and weep;
> Taught her to cherish still in either eye
> Of tender tears a plentiful supply,
> And pour them in the brooks that babbled by;
> Taught by nice scale to mete her feelings strong,
> False by degrees and exquisitely wrong;
> For the crushed beetle *first*,—the widow'd dove,
> And all the warbled sorrows of the grove;
> *Next* for poor suffering *guilt*; and *last* of all
> For parents, friends, a king and country's fall.
>
> Mark her fair votaries, prodigal of grief,
> With cureless pangs, and woes that mock relief,
> Droop in soft sorrow o'er a faded flower;
> O'er a dead jack-ass pour the pearly shower,

But hear unmoved, of *Loire's* ensanguined flood,
Choked up with slain; of *Lyons* drenched in blood;
Of crimes that blot the age, the world, with shame,
Foul crimes, but sicklied o'er with Freedom's name;
Altars and thrones subverted; social life
Trampled to earth,—the husband from the wife,
Parent from child, with ruthless fury torn,
Of talents, honour, virtue, wit, forlorn,
In friendless exile,—of the wise and good
Staining the daily scaffold with their blood;
Of savage cruelties, that scare the mind,
The rage of madness with hell's lusts combined,—
Of hearts torn reeking from the mangled breast,
They hear—and hope that ALL IS FOR THE BEST.

This passage is thoroughly representative alike of the genius of Canning and of the spirit animating *The Anti-Jacobin*. Like the argument of the great orator by whom it was inspired it is one-sided; and herein lay its strength. The times called for action, and men had to make up their minds to be for or against the French Revolution. Those who were in favour of it during its early stages, ought, as the Bishop of Llandaff did, to have owned, as its character developed, that they had been mistaken in their forecast. They did not do so; their pride forebade them; and, as Wordsworth allows in *The Prelude*, and Coleridge suggests in his mock *Recantation*, they contented themselves with reasoning that the crimes and excesses of the Revolutionary Government were the *inevitable* result of ages of misgovernment; at the same time they furiously blamed their own country for engaging in a war which it could not avoid. In attempting to preserve a middle and philosophical position at the moment of crisis, without any acknowledgment of error in themselves, such partisans justly became liable to the accusation of sophistry; and this charge Canning presses home to them in *New Morality*. Straightforward manliness is the leading feature in his own satire. As he says in characterising "Candour":

Give me th' avowed, th' erect, the manly foe,
Bold I can meet—perhaps may turn his blow;
But of all plagues, good Heaven, thy wrath can send,
Save, save, oh! save me from the *Candid Friend*!

Full of an ardent patriotism, and forced to take up arms against the internal enemies of the English Constitution, it was not his business to make fine distinctions, and balance the literary beauties of Rousseau's style—which no one was more capable than he of appreciating—against its social mischief. He rightly fixed his view on the moral relation of the Revolutionary movement to the life of his own country; and the power of his satire lies not less in his unerring perception of the tendencies which formed the key of the enemy's position, than in the wit, the fancy, the passion, and indignation which he brought to bear against them.

In Canning the civic genius of the Renaissance, acting on English statesmen and men of letters, finds its most admirable representative. One-sided though his satire is, it is, nevertheless, full of the spirit of constitutional compromise. The Renaissance, in its civic capacity, acted apart from both the two great opposing extremes—Absolutism, springing out of the decay of mediæval traditions, and Democracy, arising from the subversive temper of the Reformation: its function was to reconcile conflicting powers in a new form of Government without any breach in the continuity of national life. With this spirit the *Reflections on the French Revolution* and *The Anti-Jacobin* are alike animated. The triumph of the Revolution of 1688 was to fuse the elements of the constitution which had been rudely torn asunder in the Civil War; and if the principles of the aristocratic *régime* of which Somers and Halifax were the creators derive their highest glory from the philosophy of Burke, its character has been scarcely less worthily exalted in the poetry of Canning.

As the genius of the civic Renaissance is the inspiring principle of Canning's satire, so the ancient traditions of the English language, formed by the influence of the Renaissance, are preserved in his style. He had imbibed in full measure the classical scholarship and the social discipline of the great school in which he was educated. Not less clearly than Coleridge under the tuition of

Bowyer,[1] he had learned at Eton how to detect the spurious classicism of Darwin's manner; at the same time his sympathy with Dryden and Pope showed him, what Coleridge failed to see, that the disease corrupting the genius of the language might be eradicated by the use, if necessary, of fire or the knife. Hating affectation with the same intensity as Gifford, his mellower nature and more refined taste knew how to avoid that laboured virulence in satirising the objects of his dislike which often disfigures the style of the author of *The Baviad* and *The Maeviad.* The gallant gaiety of Canning's parodies makes them delightful reading even in a day when all memory of the originals has vanished; on the other hand, when he becomes serious, a certain touch of the mannerisms of his time distinguishes his satiric style from the rhetoric of Pope, just as his parliamentary eloquence displays a pure classical character different in kind from the elaborate stateliness of Pitt. The following passage will illustrate my meaning:

> Britain, beware; nor let th' insidious foe,
> Of force despairing, aim a deadlier blow;
> Thy peace, thy strength, with devilish wiles assail,
> And when her arms are vain by arts prevail.
> True, thou art rich, art powerful!—thro' thine Isle
> Industrious skill, contented labour, smile;
> Far seas are studded with thy countless sails;
> What wind but wafts them, and what shore but hails?
> True, thou art brave!—o'er all the busy land
> In patriot ranks embattled myriads stand;
> Thy foes behold with impotent amaze,
> And drop the lifted weapon as they gaze.
>
> But what avails to guard each outward part,
> If subtlest poison, circling at thy heart,
> Spite of thy courage, of thy power, and wealth,
> Mine the sound fabric of thy vital health?
>
> So thine own oak, by some fair streamlet's side,
> Waves its broad arms, and spreads its leafy pride,
> Towers from the earth, and rearing to the skies
> Its conscious strength, the tempest's wrath defies:
> Its ample branches shield the fowls of air,
> To its cool shade the panting herds repair.

[1] See p 193

The treacherous current works its noiseless way,
The fibres loosen, and the roots decay;
Prostrate the beauteous ruin lies; and all
That shared its shelter perish in its fall.

Mathias' work shows the widespread influence of the Renaissance on English Literature, Canning's its intimate association with English Politics. A third aspect of the same subject is illustrated by the genius of Canning's chief friend and colleague, John Hookham Frere. Frere was closely connected with Canning from early boyhood. He co-operated with him at Eton in the conduct of *The Microcosm*; in the wit of *The Anti-Jacobin* their names are joined as were those of Beaumont and Fletcher in the history of the drama; and so congenial were their natures that it is often as difficult to distinguish the hand of one from that of the other in their joint compositions as it is to assign with certainty the authorship of a critical essay in *The Spectator* to Addison rather than to Steele. While Canning, however, continued to carry on the combat with Jacobinism to the end of his career in the field of politics, circumstances caused Frere to retire early from active life, and his latter years were spent mainly in his country home or in foreign parts; but wherever he went he carried with him the same love of classical letters that solaced the leisure of Harley, Bolingbroke, Bathurst, Carteret, Fox, and all the chief political leaders of the eighteenth century. His old political inclinations still revealed themselves in his choice of authors; and the keenness with which he had entered into the political struggle in his youth enabled him, in his declining days, to interpret and reproduce the kindred passions expressed by ancient authors, with a fidelity that has made him in many respects the finest translator in the English language.

John Hookham Frere was born in London on the 21st of May 1769. He came of an ancient stock, settled as influential landowners, though without rising into political prominence, in Norfolk and Suffolk. His own verses on the family coat-of-arms are characteristic of the

deep feeling for the soil and institutions of his country which inspires his poetical contributions to *The Anti-Jacobin.*

The Flanches on our field of Gules
Denote, by known heraldic rules,
A race contented and obscure,
In mediocrity secure,
By sober parsimony thriving,
For their retired existence striving,
By well-judged purchases and matches,
Far from ambition and debauches;
Such was the life our fathers led;
Their homely leaven, deep inbred
In our whole moral composition,
Confines us to the like condition.

John Frere, his father, a man of great mathematical ability, who ran Paley hard for the honours of senior wrangler, had also scientific and antiquarian tastes, and, as a Fellow of the Royal Society, frequently contributed a paper for their *Philosophical Transactions*, besides writing for *The Gentleman's Magazine.* His son was sent to Eton in 1785, where he became a member of the brilliant group of friends who, under the leadership of Canning, produced and carried on *The Microcosm.* Entering Caius College, Cambridge, in 1788, he graduated B.A. in 1792 and M.A in 1795. In the former year he obtained the Members' Prize for a Latin Essay on the prospects of Botany Bay—a subject which, as appears from Southey's Eclogues, was then attracting public attention—and he was soon afterwards elected Fellow of his college. On leaving Cambridge he worked in the Foreign Office under Lord Grenville. In 1796 he was elected M.P. for the close borough of West Looe in Cornwall, and sat for it till the dissolution of Parliament in 1802, being of course a firm supporter of Pitt. He was Canning's chief assistant in the conduct of *The Anti-Jacobin.* As I have already said, it is exceedingly difficult to determine, from internal evidence, the shares of the several poets in pieces which are known to have been the work of more than one hand. It appears that the different papers were written in the

house of Wright the publisher, and left open by the authors on the table for additions or corrections by their colleagues; the designs of each contribution were doubtless discussed in conference. From the statements of Frere, however, we know that of these joint productions some part of *The Knife-Grinder* came from his pen; that he contributed a portion of the "Extract from the Twenty-Third Canto" of *The Progress of Man*; the opening extract from Canto I of *The Loves of the Triangles*, and much of the continuation; of *The Rovers* the extremely amusing first Act up to the Song of Rogero (which was the composition of Canning and Ellis); of Act ii. the news of the signing of *Magna Charta* in Scene 2; and the whole of Act iv. The opening lines in *New Morality* up to "No hope, no prospect to redeem it left"; the passage beginning "To thee proud Barras bows," down to "Paine, Williams, Godwin, Holcroft, praise Lepaux"—are also his work.

In 1800 Frere was appointed Minister at Lisbon, being transferred thence, on the 6th of September 1802, to Spain, where he remained as Minister till August 1804, when, owing to differences of opinion with Godoy, the incapable "Prince of Peace," a change in the Embassy was made and he returned to England. To Spain he was again sent as Minister Plenipotentiary to Ferdinand VII., but having—in all probability unjustly—to bear the blame for the failure of Sir John Moore's expedition in 1808, he was replaced by Lord Wellesley in 1809. After his recall to England, though he was at a later date offered the Embassy at St. Petersburg, Frere's political life ended. The death of his father in 1807 had put him in possession of the family estates, the management of which, varied by periodical visits to London, where he mixed much in the literary society of the day, gave him abundance of occupation and amusement. In 1816 he married Elizabeth, Dowager Countess of Erroll, and in the following year published his English imitation of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*, viz.: *Prospectus and Specimen of an Intended National Work, By William and Robert Whistlecraft of Stow-Market in Suffolk, Harness and Collar Makers, Intended to comprise the most*

CHAPTER VII

THE LAKE SCHOOL OF ENGLISH POETRY AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE: ROBERT SOUTHEY

THE region which gave a name to the school of English Poetry that began to exercise a new influence on taste at the close of the eighteenth century presented in its aspect a striking analogy to the general social condition of the English people. The repose of the stern mountains of Westmorland and Cumberland, enclosing quiet waters, and disturbed only by the movements of passing shadows and grazing sheep, reflected the general peace and order which, since the Revolution of 1688, had settled upon the constitution of society. Ruined towers and castles, scattered over the landscape, recalled the life of

> Old, unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago,

whether in the days of Border warfare, or in the struggle of the seventeenth century between feudal power and civil freedom. Time and Nature, however, had almost obliterated those traces of ancient troubles, which indeed served to link the affections of the inhabitants to a past dimly felt, without being actually remembered. The inhabitants themselves were of that middle class, yeomen, graziers, and country lawyers, which had for the most part sympathised with the Parliamentary cause in the great Civil War, but was well content with the constitutional compromise by which its own liberties and the free intercourse

Angliacae Classis ;—quae majestate verenda
ultrix, inconcussa, diu dominabitur orbi,
hostibus invidiosa tuis, et saepe triumphis
nobilitata novis, pelagi Regina subacti.

Such was the dominant temper of a nation which, with rebellion threatened in Ireland, and mutiny prevailing in the Fleets at the Nore and at Spithead, without removing a vessel from the blockade of the Dutch coasts, confronted the whole power of the conqueror who had overwhelmed the armies of the mightiest monarchs of Europe, and who, having in the name of Revolutionary liberty established an iron despotism on the plains of Italy, the mother of modern civilisation, had crushed the historic freedom of the Swiss Republic!

CHAPTER [illegible]

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of commerce and society had been secured. At the same time they were too far removed from the centre of political action to exert much influence on the course of affairs, and formed, in fact, part of the unrepresented classes in a system of government essentially oligarchical. In the words of the poet who specially represented its spirit, the Lake country was a

> Poor district, and which yet
> Retaineth more of ancient homeliness
> Than any other nook of English ground;

a region in which, he continues,

> It was my fortune scarcely to have seen
> Through the whole tenor of my school-day time
> The face of one who, whether boy or man,
> Was vested with attention or respect
> Through claims of wealth or blood.[1]

It was natural that the imagination of a society like this, not deeply penetrated with the refinements of classic literature, should readily respond to the romantic sentiments which had already proved attractive to the taste of the aristocratic classes in the South of England, when presented to them in the poems of the pseudo-Ossian, the *Reliques of Ancient English Literature*, and the philosophy of Rousseau.

The three poets, whose close association with each other, and common residence in the Lake district, caused them to be classed in the public mind as a single group, could not be said to have acquired the title of "school" from any close resemblance in their genius and artistic style; they were, in fact, distinguished by the most striking oppositions of character. Certain fundamental sympathies, however, drew them together, and, causing them to exercise a mutual influence on each other, justified the instinct of their critics in regarding them as literary allies. All of them were united in a deliberate opposition to the prevailing taste of the age. All of them were inspired at the outset by enthusiasm for the principles of the French Revolution. All of them were indignant with their own

[1] *The Prelude*, Book ix.

countrymen for their hostile attitude towards the French. Each of them after a time seceded from the political creed he had originally adopted, and finally joined the most obstinate of his former adversaries in opposing it. Their philosophical and religious faith was constantly modified by the change in their political opinions, which also exerted a powerful influence upon the growth of their artistic taste. In considering the progress of the Lake School it will be well therefore to keep the personal history of its three great leaders in close touch, noting the reciprocal influence, moral, political, and literary, which each exercised on his friend's genius, and the manner in which the combination was brought gradually to transform the established character of the public taste. In the case of two of them we are fortunately able to trace their poetic development by the aid of autobiography; the third, whose style departed less widely from accepted tradition, offers to the historian a comparatively easy subject of study from the simpler nature of his work.

William Wordsworth, the senior of the triumvirate, and the one most intimately connected by family associations with the Lake district, was born at Cockermouth on the 7th of April 1770. He was the second son of John Wordsworth—a solicitor in the town, and estate agent to Lord Lonsdale—and came of a stock originally derived from Yorkshire. In his *Address from the Spirit of Cockermouth Castle* the poet speaks of the effect produced upon his youthful imagination by the air of feudal decay in the place; and in his sonnet *To the River Derwent* he carries back to a still earlier moment the influence of the natural objects which surrounded him from his birth:

> Among the mountains were we nursed, loved stream!
> Thou near the eagle's nest—within brief sail,
> I, of his bold wing floating on the gale,
> Where thy deep voice could lull me! Faint the beam
> Of human life, when first allowed to gleam
> On mortal notice.

Sent to school in his ninth year at Hawkshead, a village in the neighbourhood, he records in *The Prelude*

the virtues of the old Dame, "so kind and motherly," with whom he was boarded; and the master of the school, William Taylor, became the subject of his three poems on "Matthew." From his account of himself in *The Prelude* it would appear that it was on an occasion some time after his tenth year that he first realised in a semi-conscious way the mysterious power of Nature on his mind.[1] Following out the theory of his own poetic development, he supposes these unconscious influences to have been succeeded by a number of counteracting forces which checked and partially suppressed his creative faculty. The first was his education at Cambridge. He matriculated at St. John's College in October 1787. Here, as may readily be believed, he found little in the systematic studies of the University which he could reconcile with the vague impressions of society derived from his wanderings among the hills of Westmorland; nor is there anything in his autobiographical recollections of undergraduate life at Cambridge which is other than commonplace. He regards it indeed as a regular stage in his own intellectual growth, but, looking back on it in maturer years, he confesses that he is unable to distinguish how much of the feeling present at the time of writing was really in his mind during his student days;[2] his descriptions of University life are undefined, phantom-like, and wanting in character, as indeed is usually the case with his portraits of men and manners. He professes to have been able consciously to compare old age, as seen among the northern shepherds, with the examples of it among the Cambridge authorities—much, it is needless to say, to the disadvantage of the latter;[3]

[1] *Prelude*, Book i.: lines beginning "One summer evening," etc.

[2] Of these and other kindred notices
I cannot say what portion is in truth
The naked recollection of the time,
And what may rather have been called to life
By after-meditation.

Prelude, Book iii.

[3] See the lines beginning

Here on my view confronting visibly, etc.

Prelude, Book iii.

his future life. At Paris, where he stayed for a short time on his way to Orleans, he had glimpses of the chaos prevailing in the Legislative Assembly and in the club of the Jacobins. Arrived at Orleans he found himself perplexed by his want of insight into the political situation, but was drawn into a general kind of sympathy with the Republican cause, which was strengthened at Blois, whither he soon went, by companionship with Michael Beaupuy, an officer in the French Army, who, by abstract discussion, inoculated him with his own fervent Republican opinions. By this man his attention was first drawn to the wretched condition of the French peasantry, and he became confirmed in the belief that, with the overthrow of the existing *régime*,

We should see the earth
Unthwarted in her wish to recompense
The meek, the lowly, patient child of toil,
All institutes for ever blotted out
That legalised exclusion, empty pomp
Abolished, sensual state and cruel power,
Whether by edict of the one or few;
And finally, as sum and crown of all,
Should see the people having a strong hand
In framing their own laws; whence better days
To all mankind.[1]

To this Utopian view of human nature he seems to have been brought by the persuasions of Beaupuy, who also told him the rather commonplace story which he afterwards reproduced in verse, with the title of *Vaudracour and Julia*.

Fired by the abstract sentiments of his new political creed, Wordsworth became eager to translate it into action; but here he at once found himself in the presence of insuperable obstacles. In the first place, he was confronted with the September Massacres, a blood-thirsty comment on his theory of the instinctive benevolence of human nature. This, however, he easily encountered with the consideration that the massacres were the inevitable consequence of centuries of misrule; and he tells us that, on his return to Paris, he thought of allying

[1] *The Prelude*, Book ix.

himself with the Girondist party, in the hope (though he had but an imperfect command of the French language) of becoming one of its leaders. From this dream he was awakened by the refusal of his friends at home to continue his supplies, and he was thus forced to return to England. It is an interesting sign of character that, in his poetical autobiography, though he might as readily have versified such an experience as any of the others he records, he entirely suppresses it, representing his return home as having been caused solely by the difficulty he found in joining politicians with whom he was but imperfectly agreed. Still eager to fight in the cause of cosmopolitan Liberty, he discovered that in England a violent reaction had set in among the Whig party against the principles of the French Revolution. The execution of Louis XVI., following the September Massacres, alienated the sympathies of those who had, up to that point, approved the action of the Legislative Assembly, and their recantation was publicly made in a sermon by Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, who had already written to Talleyrand protesting against the trial of the King. This backsliding on the part of the Bishop inspired Wordsworth, a member of the same University and the same political party, to utter (in a letter which, however, he did not publish) a solemn counter-protest. Watson's pamphlet, as the work of a renegade, was sufficiently open to attack, and his critic had a simple task in exposing his inconsistency; but the advocacy of Wordsworth's own principles, which involved the abolition of hereditary titles, the Established Church, and corporate property, was not undertaken in a spirit likely to attract an audience enthralled by the glowing eloquence of Burke

Shortly afterwards, Wordsworth's humanitarianism suffered a still severer shock from the declaration of war by England against France. Consistently with that air of somewhat doctrinaire self-satisfaction which pervades *The Prelude*, though his alienation from his old opinions was then complete, he casts the blame of them, not on his own inexperience, but on the policy of the English

Government. Even in 1805 he insists on regarding the question from an exclusively moral point of view, without taking into account the material forces which, in the actual world, cause wars between nations. Like Coleridge, he retained to the end a hatred of Pitt. Pitt, however, had acted as a statesman. So long as it was possible he adhered to his proclaimed principle of non-intervention; and it was only when the aggression of the French Jacobins on the Netherlands endangered alike the liberties of other countries and the national interests of England that he decided reluctantly to draw the sword.

The consequence of the declaration of war was to produce in the mind of Wordsworth a complicated moral crisis, from the conflict between his patriotism and his cosmopolitan aspirations. His vehement political creed cut him off from all opportunities of public action in England. For a work of philosophical poetry his genius was not sufficiently mature. He had indeed published, soon after his return to England in 1793, a little volume of poems entitled *An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches*, in which he attempted to carry out a resolution, formed when he was only fourteen years of age, to supply the observed deficiency in poetry of exact descriptions of external Nature;[1] but the publication was, he tells us, only intended to prove to his friends that he was capable of doing something in the way of literature. These poems showed, as was natural, many marks of youthful imitation. In the *Evening Walk*, which is dated "1787-8," there are evident recollections of *Windsor Forest*, *The Seasons*, *The Deserted Village*, and *The Task*. But in no English verse that had yet appeared had the representation of detail in landscape been so elaborate and minute: no poet had noted so keenly the effect on the imagination of the silent, mysterious movements of Nature, such as are recorded in the following description of the fading lights of evening:

> Now with religious awe the farewell light
> Blends with the solemn colouring of night;

[1] *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, by Canon Wordsworth, vol. i. p. 13.

Midst groves of clouds that crest the mountain's brow,
And round the west's proud lodge their shadows throw,
Like Una shining on her gloomy way,
The half-seen form of Twilight roams astray;
Shedding, through paly loop-holes mild and small,
Gleams that upon the lake's still bosom fall;
Soft o'er the surface creep those lustres pale,
Tracking the motions of the fitful gale.
With restless interchange at once the bright
Wins on the shade, the shade upon the light.
No favoured eye was e'er allowed to gaze
On lovelier spectacle in faery days;
When gentle spirits urged a sportive chase,
Brushing with lucid wands the water's face;
While music, stealing round the glimmering deeps,
Charmed the tall circle of enchanted steeps
—The lights are vanished from the watery plains;
No wreck of all the pageantry remains
Unheeded night has overcome the vales:
On the dark earth the weary vision fails;
The latest lingerer of the forest train,
The lone black fir, forsakes the faded plain;
Last evening sight, the cottage smoke, no more,
Lost in the thickened darkness, glimmers hoar;
And towering from the sullen dark-brown mere,
Like a black wall, the mountain-steeps appear.
—Now o'er the soothed accordant heart we feel
A sympathetic twilight slowly steal,
And ever, as we fondly muse, we find
The soft glow deepening on the tranquil mind.
Stay, pensive, sadly-pleasing visions, stay!
Ah no! as fades the vale they fade away:
Yet still the tender vacant gloom remains;
Still the cold cheek its shuddering tear retains.

The *Descriptive Sketches*, commemorative of Wordsworth's undergraduate trip to France and Switzerland, and dedicated to his companion, Robert Jones, are less remarkable than the *Evening Walk*, inasmuch as they necessarily reflect only the superficial impressions of a foreign landscape on a stranger's eye. Clearly modelled on Goldsmith's *Traveller*, the poems are at the same time full of touches characteristic of Wordsworth, and are interesting as a contemporary record of his feelings towards the French Revolution, more trustworthy perhaps as autobiography than his reproduction of them in *The*

Prelude, when revised in the light of memory and an altered judgment. The sympathetic heart and keen intelligence of Coleridge noted in the volume the advent of a new poet, superior in power to any of his contemporaries; otherwise it attracted little notice, and in Wordsworth the impulse to poetical composition was for a long time checked by the stress of political disappointment.

Enamoured as he was of a particular dream of Liberty, the course of events seemed everywhere to run counter to his hopes. France, which he had thought would be a single-hearted herald of the new faith, had sadly failed to fulfil his expectations. From his native country he was estranged, because she had actively opposed herself to his ideals. It became the more necessary for him to justify his theories to his own mind, and to explain their failure in the world by some system of philosophy, showing that the sound principles of the French Revolution had been blighted in their effect by radical disease in the constitution of society. Such a system he found prepared to his hand in William Godwin's *Inquiry into Political Justice*.

The fundamental principles of this book were in themselves merely a revival of the old doctrines of the Stoics, modified by the views of the French Encyclopaedists. Evil, in the opinion of the author, is the result of the aberration of human society from the paths of pure reason, under the misguidance of inveterate prejudices, themselves springing out of old institutions. These prejudices have in the course of ages come to be regarded as innate ideas in the mind. But the mind of each individual is at birth nothing more—so Godwin taught—than a blank sheet of paper, on which, without any free will in man, Nature writes her experiences, leaving them to be afterwards classified by memory and reason. Freedom consists in the unfettered exercise of reason, which, emancipated from prejudice, shows the individual how to act on each occasion as the nature of circumstances, measured by general utility, requires. That the world in general may arrive at the truth, it is necessary to sweep away existing social institutions as the source of prejudice, and to allow each

man, rising above patriotic sentiment and personal emotion, to view the world through the unclouded eye of reason.)

To this abstract system of philosophy Wordsworth was attracted during the years 1793-96, while suffering from the state of disgust produced in him, on the one hand by the mad actions of the French Revolutionists, and on the other by the anti-French policy of the English Government. He lived while in London in the midst of a Godwinian circle. He gave a blind adherence to Godwin's necessarian doctrines. In poetry the sole fruits of his imagination (besides some unpublished satires, a kind of composition for which he had no talent) were the poem afterwards called *Guilt and Sorrow* and his so-called tragedy *The Borderers.* The latter was an attempt to mould the philosophy of Godwin into a poetical form, apparently, however, with a view of exposing the disastrous consequences of those principles in it which demanded the suppression of the natural instincts of love and pity. The action of the play—clearly suggested in the first place by *The Robbers* of Schiller—exhibits the wavering purpose of a benevolent but feeble youth,—captain of a band of outlaws, bound together by oath to remedy social injustice,—who, under the influence of a villain of powerful intellect, emancipated from all prejudice, perpetrates the death of an innocent old man. If Wordsworth's aim in *The Borderers* were indeed to discredit in part the moral teaching of Godwin, the artistic means that he took were ill suited for his purpose, since nothing could be proved from a story which offended against every rule of poetic probability. But whatever was his object in writing the play, we have his own confession in *The Prelude* that the opinions of Godwin were those by which he was inspired after the declaration of war with France:

> This was the time, when, all things tending fast
> To depravation, speculative schemes—
> That promised to abstract the hopes of Man
> Out of his feelings, to be fixed thenceforth
> For ever in a purer element—
> Found ready welcome Tempting region *that*
> For Zeal to enter and refresh herself,

Where passions had the privilege to work,
And never hear the sound of their own names.
But, speaking more in charity, the dream
Flattered the young, pleased with extremes, nor least
With that which makes our Reason's naked self
The object of its fervour. What delight!
How glorious! in self-knowledge and self-rule,
To look through all the frailties of the world,
And, with a resolute mastery shaking off
Infirmities of nature, time, and place,
Build social upon personal Liberty,
Which, to the blind restraints of general laws
Superior, magisterially adopts
One guide, the light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent intellect.[1]

From the unpoetical region of Godwinian philosophy Wordsworth was brought back to his old feeling for Nature by the influence of his sister. Dorothy Wordsworth was rather more than a year younger than her brother William. She had shared the passionate delight he had experienced in his earliest impressions, and was convinced that it was his destiny to be a poet. But their companionship had been broken off when they were left orphans, and Dorothy had been removed to the house of an uncle, who so strongly disapproved of William's refusal to follow any regular profession and of his republican principles that, after 1790, he kept the brother and sister strictly apart. They met again at Halifax in 1794, and made a tour together into the Lake district. Wordsworth was at this time at the end of his resources, but in 1795 a small legacy, left him by a young friend, Raisley Calvert, enabled him to carry out a design, long cherished by himself and his sister, of living together in a cottage. They settled in a farm-house at Racedown in Dorsetshire, and occupied it for about two years, during which time Wordsworth gradually recovered the old impressions and sentiments of his boyhood. As he acknowledges in *The Prelude*, this restoration to mental health was mainly due to his sister. Dorothy, though without her brother's poetic imagination, had all his keen appreciation of the beauty of Nature, and an

[1] *The Prelude*, Book xi.

even finer faculty for observing the minute movements of its inner life. She had seen with regret William's deviation, from the poetical sphere which she rightly considered his own, into the paths of political and philosophical controversy, and she now exerted all the charm of their old relationship to revive in his imagination the power of childish influences. The numerous entries in her Journals, which furnished materials for her brother's versification, show how constant and how fruitful was the intercourse between the two minds.

At the same time this exclusive companionship between brother and sister was not without its drawbacks in respect of Wordsworth's practice of his art. He had almost from infancy begun to form his idea of poetry on an abstract principle of contemplation, based solely on his own individual experience, and he continued to pursue this line of thought without reference to that general course of action in English society which had been gradually evolved by centuries of civil and religious conflict. When he passed from Hawkshead to Cambridge, one of the chief intellectual centres of the Renaissance, he contented himself with contrasting advantageously the simple life of the Lake shepherds with the complex constitution of Academic order. The account that he gives of his residence in London shows that he viewed men and things there entirely on the surface, having no knowledge of the secret springs that were at work in the historic centre of English political action. It is not wonderful therefore that, during his stay in France, he should easily have surrendered his judgment to the cosmopolitan view of society presented to him by a Republican and disciple of Rousseau. His Godwinian creed was adopted on grounds equally unsocial in the usual sense of the word; and when his belief in the new Stoicism also failed him, he formed for himself a philosophy of life which, though to some extent based on actual experience, was still completely abstract in principle. Seeing that it was impossible to exclude from any genuinely philosophical system the effects of imagination and emotion, he re-

constructed his idea of society on a study of the elementary instincts in the peasantry about him, thinking that thus he should be brought more nearly within sight of the energies of Nature uncorrupted by the false artifices of civilisation:

When I began to inquire,
To watch and question those I met, and speak
Without reserve to them, the lonely roads
Were open schools in which I daily read
With most delight the passions of mankind,
Whether by words, looks, sighs, or tears, revealed;
There saw into the depth of human souls,
Souls that appear to have no depth at all
To careless eyes. And—now convinced at heart
How little these formalities, to which
With overweening trust alone we give
The name of Education, have to do
With real feeling, and just sense; how vain
A correspondence with the talking world
Proves to the most; and called to make good search
If man's estate, by doom of nature yoked
With toil, be therefore yoked with ignorance;
If virtue be indeed so hard to rear,
And intellectual strength so rare a boon—
I prized such walks still more, for there I found
Hope to my hope, and to my pleasure peace,
And steadiness, and healing, and repose
To every angry passion. There I heard,
From mouths of men obscure and lowly, truths
Replete with honour; sounds in unison
With loftiest promises of good and fair.[1]

All this might be well as a corrective to a mind misled by the doctrines of Godwin; but to suppose that the passions of mankind, whose complex moods are displayed in such contrasted characters as Falstaff, Henry V., Iago, Hamlet, and Jaques, could be fully, or even accurately, studied within the narrow range of action to which persons like Goody Blake, Betty Foy, or Simon Lee are necessarily restricted, was to reconstruct the idea of society on a base entirely wanting in proportion.

Dorothy Wordsworth had not the qualifications for pointing out to her brother the perversities of his new creed. Her simple and earnest character had been

[1] *The Prelude*, Book xiii.

disturbed by none of the influences with which his had been overwhelmed; and though her soothing companionship was like balm to his wounded spirit, and her exquisite powers of observation stimulated his poetic energy, her admiration for his genius tended rather to flatter than to strengthen his judgment of his own productions. If his imagination was to be lifted into a loftier sphere, communication with a mind of superior philosophical power was urgently needed; and this necessary complement to his intellect was not furnished till, at some date in the autumn of 1796, he made acquaintance with Coleridge.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the twelfth and youngest son of John Coleridge, Vicar of Ottery St. Mary in Devonshire and head-master of the Grammar School in the town. He was born on the 21st of October 1772, and lost his father before he was nine years old. From his earliest childhood he had grown into habits of curious self-consciousness. "I had all the simplicity, all the docility of the little child," he says of himself, "but none of the child's habits. I never thought as a child—never had the language of a child."[1] This unnatural precocity turned his imagination over-early into a metaphysical channel. Soon after his father's death he received a presentation to Christ's Hospital, the head-master of which, James Bowyer or Boyer, an excellent scholar and strict disciplinarian, did much to habituate the boy's imagination to that critical sense of form and beauty for which he was afterwards distinguished.

Nevertheless, "at a very premature age, even before my fifteenth year," says he, "I had bewildered myself in metaphysics and in theological controversy. Nothing else pleased me. History and particular facts lost all interest in my mind. Poetry (though for a school boy of that age I was above par in English versification, and had already produced two or three compositions which I may venture to say were somewhat above mediocrity, and which had gained me more credit than the sound good sense of my old master was at all pleased with)—poetry itself, yea, novels and romance, became insipid to me"[2]

[1] *Coleridge's Poems* (Dykes Campbell), p. xiii
[2] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol i chap. i.

Between his fifteenth and seventeenth year the well-known apostrophe of Charles Lamb seems to present the picture of his mental growth:

> How have I seen the casual passer through the cloisters stand still, entranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the speech and the garb of the young Mirandula), to hear thee unfold in thy deep and sweet intonations the mysteries of Iamblichus or Plotinus (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting Homer in his Greek, or Pindar, while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of *the inspired charity-boy*.[1]

Metaphysical speculation was followed by a period of poetry and love-making. To the former he was impelled by his admiration for the Sonnets of William Lisle Bowles (1762-1850), fourteen in number, the second edition of which was published when Coleridge was just seventeen; and so great was his enthusiasm for these compositions that he declares that he made forty copies of them for distribution to friends. They served as models for the sonnets which about the same time he began to write to Mary Evans, sister of one of his school-fellows, for whom he conceived a passion that ended in disappointment. On the 12th of January 1791 he obtained an Exhibition at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he matriculated on 26th March 1792; becoming a Foundation Scholar of the College on the 5th of June 1794. After winning in 1792 the Browne Gold Medal for a Greek Sapphic Ode on the Slave Trade, and being one of four selected from the University in the same year to compete for the Craven Scholarship, he suddenly disappeared from Cambridge, and, under the name of Silas Tomkyn Comberbach, enlisted on the 2nd of December 1793 in the King's Regiment of Light Dragoons. This action seems to have been the result of momentary impulse, occasioned partly by money embarrassments, partly by disappointment in love. Finding himself entirely unfitted for a soldier's life he disclosed his real name, and through the help of his

[1] *Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago.*

brothers procured a discharge on the 2nd of April 1794, after which he almost at once returned to Cambridge. But it is evident that his views were at this stage thoroughly unsettled. As early as May 1793 he had made himself conspicuous by his sympathy for William Frend, a Fellow of Jesus College, when the latter was being tried in the Vice-Chancellor's Court for propagating heterodox opinions in politics and religion, and on the 12th of June 1794 he paid a visit to an old school-fellow at University College, Oxford, obviously with a view of disseminating his revolutionary opinions among the undergraduates. It was on this occasion that he made the acquaintance of one who was afterwards closely connected with him both by family relationship and literary sympathy.

Robert Southey was born at Bristol on the 12th of August 1774. His father, a linen-draper in the city, failed in business, and from his third year the boy was taken under the charge of his mother's half-sister, by whom he was sent in 1788 to Westminster School. Thence he was expelled in 1792 for writing an essay against flogging, in which he reflected on the injustice of his schoolmaster. He matriculated at Balliol College, Oxford, on the 3rd of November 1792, after having been refused admission to Christ Church in consequence of his expulsion from Westminster. His college tutor left him to his own devices, and these led him into all kinds of miscellaneous reading, so that, when he first fell in with Coleridge, his mind was in a fluctuating state that laid it completely open to the captivating talk of his visitor. Then was first broached the scheme of Pantisocracy afterwards described both by Southey and Coleridge to their common friend, Thomas Poole. Twelve gentlemen of good education and liberal principles were to [illegible] with twelve ladies, fixing themselves in some [illegible] part of the backwoods of America. [illegible] support the community by labourin[illegible] hours a day, the rest of the time [illegible] and discussion. The women [illegible]

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[1] *Thomas Poole and his Friends*, by Mrs. S... Years Ago

wished him to undertake the education of her sons. On the other hand, the magic of his eloquence attracted to him many new friends. Among them were Thomas Poole, a rich farmer of Somersetshire; Thelwall, the political agitator; and Charles Lloyd, a young man with poetical aspirations, the son of a Birmingham banker, who was so much enamoured of his conversation that he asked to be allowed to be received into his family. Consent to this latter arrangement was given almost at the same time that Coleridge received news of the birth of his eldest son, named Hartley after the philosopher whom he then chiefly admired. Scarcely had Lloyd joined the household when he exhibited tendencies to epilepsy; and, under pressure of this trouble and of financial straits, Coleridge migrated to a cottage at Nether Stowey, hoping to receive there consolation and encouragement from the companionship of Poole. Earlier in this year —1796—he had published through Cottle a volume of *Poems on Various Subjects*, reflecting in a vivid manner the shifting hues of his many-coloured imagination. Nothing can better suggest the character of these poems than his description of his own mind and habits at this period.

"I am, and ever have been," he writes to Thelwall, "a great reader, and have read almost everything. . . . I am *deep* in all out-of-the-way books, whether of the monkish times or of the puritanical era. I have read and digested most of the historic writers, but I do not *like* history. Metaphysics and poetry and 'facts of the mind' (*i.e.* accounts of all strange phantasms that ever possessed your philosophy-dreamers, from Theuth the Egyptian to Taylor the English pagan) are my darling studies. In short, I seldom read except to amuse myself, and I am almost always reading. Of useful knowledge—I am a so-so chemist, and I love chemistry—all else is blank—but I will be (please God) an horticulturist and farmer. I compose very little, and I absolutely hate composition. Such is my dislike that even a sense of duty is sometimes too weak to overpower it. . . . As to my own poetry, I do confess that it frequently, both in thought and language, deviates from 'nature and simplicity' . . . it seldom exhibits unmixed and simple tenderness or passion; my philosophical opinions are blended with or deduced

from my feelings, and this, I think, peculiarises my style of writing, and like everything else it is sometimes a beauty and sometimes a fault.[1]"

From what has been said it will readily be seen that two men so variously gifted as Wordsworth and Coleridge, sharing so many common perceptions, but of such different capacities, were certain when brought into daily companionship to be reciprocally stimulated by each other. Both from very early years were unconsciously educating themselves on semi-Godwinian principles, their ideal being to "build social upon personal liberty." By "personal liberty" each meant the power of freely translating into action the teaching of what they termed "Nature," and by "social liberty" the opportunity of persuading others to follow their example, destroying in the process the fetters of "prejudice," as they called it; in other words, the doctrines derived from custom and old institutions. By "Nature" they meant the most fundamental thoughts and feelings that they could discover by introspection in their own minds. To Wordsworth Nature signified the mysterious intuitions, amounting to moral convictions, experienced by him in his solitary reveries among his native lakes and mountains, feelings which he desired to mould into philosophic form. Persistent as he was in this purpose, the stubborn soil of his understanding did not prove immediately fruitful: his methods of reasoning were crude; his intellectual experience narrow; and he had been led away by political excitements from the contemplative quietism to which he was naturally inclined. Coleridge, on the contrary, found the prompting of Nature in the lightning impulses of his own intelligence. He was "of imagination all compact"—imagination that bore him with equal swiftness into the spheres of creative poetry or of philosophical analysis, and he had all the improviser's facility of expression. From his youth he was haunted by an ambition to build up a scheme of absolute philosophy on the basis of revealed religion, and in pursuit of

[1] *Coleridge's Poems* (edited by T. Dykes Campbell), p xxix.

he wrote to Southey, was the greatest man he had ever met. If some of his own enthusiastic admirers, Thomas Poole or Charles Lamb, questioned the grounds of his rather servile admiration for the elder poet, he insisted that their hesitation to follow his example was due to their own insensibility. To William Godwin he wrote:

If I die and the booksellers make you any offer for writing my life do not fail to say: Wordsworth descended upon him like the Γνῶθι σεαυτόν from heaven, and by showing him what true poetry was, made him know that he himself was not a poet.

Wordsworth's doctrine of the ethical influence of Nature came, in fact, like a revelation to Coleridge's ardent and agitated mind; and the subsidence of political passion in poems like *Frost at Midnight* and *The Nightingale* shows the soothing effect on his imagination of his friend's philosophy. Like Wordsworth, he resigned himself after the disenchantment produced by the French invasion of Switzerland to look for Liberty only in the free communion between Nature and the mind of man:

The Sensual and the Dark rebel in vain,
Slaves by their own compulsion! In mad game
They burst their manacles and wear the name
Of Freedom, graven on a heavier chain!
O Liberty! with profitless endeavour
Have I pursued thee, many a weary hour;
But thou nor swell'st the victor's strain, nor ever
Didst breathe thy soul in forms of human power.
Alike from all, howe'er they praise thee,
(Nor prayer, nor boastful name delays thee)
Alike from Priestcraft's harpy minions,
And factious Blasphemy's obscener slaves,
Thou speedest on thy subtle pinions,
The guide of homeless winds, and playmate of the waves!
And there I felt thee!—on that sea-cliff's verge,
Whose pines, scarce travelled by the breeze above,
Had made one murmur with the distant surge!
Yes, while I stood and gazed, my temples bare,
And shot my being through earth, sea and air,
Possessing all things with intensest love,
O Liberty! my spirit felt thee there.[1]

[1] *Coleridge's Poems* (Dykes Campbell), p. 126. "France."

The unqualified submission of a genius such as that of Coleridge to his own could hardly fail to confirm Wordsworth's confidence in the inspired source of his poetical mission. From the public *Lyrical Ballads* met with a somewhat mixed reception. The taste of the general reader had been to a certain extent prepared to welcome poems of extreme simplicity, so that even compositions like *The Idiot Boy* found critical admirers; but Southey (whose opinion of the volume was unfavourable) stood alone in recognising the grandeur of the lines *Written above Tintern Abbey*, and neither he nor any of the other public critics could see poetical merit in the most remarkable piece in the collection, *The Ancient Mariner*. The sale of the *Ballads* was small, but Wordsworth, undismayed by the want of public appreciation, proceeded in 1800 to issue a new edition, in which he not only inserted a considerable number of new poems illustrative of his own theory of the art, but fortified this by an elaborate Preface. It is here that the influence of Coleridge on his intellect is first made apparent; for no one, who compares the cumbrous sentences, in which Wordsworth describes the general character of the Poet, with the brilliant criticism to the same effect in *Biographia Literaria*, will doubt that, in the former, the apologist (as in his later essays on the distinction between Imagination and Fancy) is assaying the metaphysical armour he has borrowed from his friend.

The full fruits of the poetical partnership between Wordsworth and Coleridge, and Coleridge and Southey, may be said to have matured themselves during the Napoleonic wars. Almost every characteristic poem of Wordsworth was either published or written before the battle of Waterloo: in the poetry of Coleridge the inspiring impulse had ceased long before that date, though *Christabel*, *Kubla Khan*, and *The Pains of Sleep* were not published till 1816. Southey after the appearance of *Roderick* almost abandoned verse composition. For a biographical view of the Lake School therefore it is only necessary to sketch briefly the nature of the relationship between the three poets from the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* till their several deaths.

Wordsworth's poetical development, during his period of active inspiration, proceeded in a steady course from the philosophical basis agreed upon in the conversations at Nether Stowey. *Peter Bell* was written in 1798. *The Prelude*, conceived with Coleridge's enthusiastic approval in the same year, was completed in 1805. In 1807 was published a volume of collected poems containing among others the grand Ode on the *Intimations of Immortality*, the *Ode to Duty*, the fine series of Sonnets dedicated to *National Independence and Liberty*, and the *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle*. In the same volume with *The Excursion*, published in 1814, was included *Laodamia*. *The Waggoner*, though it did not appear in print till 1819, had been written as early as 1805. To complete the plan of *The Recluse*, as designed at Nether Stowey, a third section was, according to Wordsworth, still wanting; but this was never brought into existence. His last thirty years bore no poetical fruits beyond a certain number of sonnets, *e.g.* those on *The River Duddon*, *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, and others suggested during tours on the Continent and in Scotland. From Coleridge, through force of circumstances, after their association at Nether Stowey, he drifted apart gradually but widely. Starting together at the end of 1798 on a tour to Germany, for the purpose of learning the language and studying natural science, they soon separated, and Wordsworth with his sister returned in a short time to England, to settle in December 1799 at Dove Cottage, Townend, near Grasmere, which they occupied till 1808, removing from it into the parsonage at Grasmere, and thence again, in 1813, to Rydal Mount, where Wordsworth spent the remainder of his long and peaceful life. He married in 1802 Mary Hutchinson, his old school-fellow and his sister's great friend. Until his last years, in spite of his growing reputation, he made scarcely any profits from his poetry; but the assistance of friends and admirers, joined to his own economical habits, gave him a sufficiency till 1813, when, through the influence of Lord Lonsdale, he obtained the appointment of Distributor of Stamps for the

County of Westmorland, and with it a position of ease and relative affluence. In 1843 he was appointed Poet Laureate in succession to Southey, and in that capacity wrote in 1847 one official Ode on the Installation of the Prince Consort as Chancellor of the University. He died on the 23rd of April 1850, and was buried in Grasmere Churchyard.

More varied and tragic was the history of Coleridge, on whose versatile imagination and weak will the philosophical resolution formed at Nether Stowey exerted only a passing influence. After parting from the Wordsworths in Germany he exhibited a brief spell of courageous intellectual effort. He mastered the German language, studied German metaphysics, and on his return to England in the autumn of 1799, besides writing vigorously on politics in the *Morning Chronicle*, actually completed a fine translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein* But different causes soon threw him back into barren indolence. To be near the Wordsworths he removed his home from Nether Stowey to Greta Hall, Keswick, where, in 1802, during a brief fit of inspiration, he composed the second part of *Christabel*, the first having been completed at Nether Stowey in 1797. Unfortunately the moral influence of his friends was insufficient to sustain his mental energy. Years before, yielding to a momentary impulse, he had sought to escape from physical pain by the use of laudanum, and he had now acquired the habit of eating opium in the hope of deadening the violent attacks of rheumatism to which he was subject. At the same time the consequences of an impulsive and ill-assorted marriage became fully visible. Mrs. Coleridge was not qualified by sympathy to be his intellectual companion, and perpetual disagreements between husband and wife made his home almost unbearable to him. The sense of his own moral deterioration, always pressing on his sensitive conscience, combined with the physical pains caused by the use of the drug, gradually destroyed his powers of poetical creation. Read in the light of these facts, nothing can be more pathetic than the comparison

of the following stanzas from *Dejection* (written in 1802, and originally addressed to Wordsworth) with the last stanza of *France*, composed while he was still in the first glow of enthusiasm aroused in him by Wordsworth's revelation to him of the healing powers of Nature:

II

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
  A stifled, drowsy, unimpassion'd grief,
  Which finds no nat'ral outlet, no relief,
In word, or sigh, or tear—
O EDMUND! in this wan and heartless mood,
To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo'd,
All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
  Have I been gazing on the Western sky,
And its peculiar tint of yellow-green:
  And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye!
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars;
Those stars, that glide behind them, or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimm'd, but always seen;
Yon crescent moon, as fix'd as if it grew,
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue,
A boat becalm'd, a lovely sky-canoe!
I see them all so excellently fair—
I *see*, not *feel*, how beautiful they are!

III

  My genial spirits fail;
  And what can these avail,
To lift the smoth'ring weight from off my breast?
  It were a vain endeavour,
  Though I should gaze for ever
On that green light that lingers in the west:
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.[1]

To follow all the painful incidents in his life is unnecessary; and for the purposes of this history it is sufficient to note that after 1804 he began a period of fitful wandering, with short visits at intervals to his home at Greta Hall; that in 1808 he projected a weekly periodical, *The Friend*, which, after having been launched

[1] *Coleridge's Poetical Works* (Dykes Campbell), p. 522.

on 1st June 1809, was carried on very irregularly till the twenty-seventh number on 15th March 1810, when, like *The Watchman*, it ceased to appear; and that, in October of the same year, there was a rupture of the friendship with the Wordsworths, which—though a formal reconciliation was effected in 1812—was never resumed on the old footing. In January 1813 his tragedy of *Remorse*, which, under the name of *Osorio*, had been written at Nether Stowey as early as 1797, was acted at Drury Lane, and, being successful, ran for twenty nights. The years from 1813 to 1816 were spent mainly at Bristol and Calne, being occupied fitfully with lectures, journalism, and projects of philosophy. He wrote also his *Biographia Literaria* and made a collection of his poems with the title *Sibylline Leaves* (not published till 1817), while, at the suggestion of Byron, he composed another play called *Zapolya*, which was offered to the manager of Covent Garden Theatre, but was not accepted. Byron also induced Murray to undertake the publication of *Christabel*, which, with *Kubla Khan* and *The Pains of Sleep*, appeared in pamphlet form in 1816. Almost at the same time Coleridge put himself into the hands of Mr. Gillman, an apothecary of Highgate, to whose watchful care was due the comparative repose of his later years. His health improved and his tranquillity of mind increased, but his faculty of imaginative creation, almost of literary production, was extinct. He still talked in such a way as to leave on all who heard him—among others, Irving and Carlyle—a sense of his inspiration. At times he lectured with more or less success, and he was as full as ever of great philosophical projects. But there was no performance, and the picture of his life in 1821 cannot be more vividly painted than in the record of his own words, given by his best biographer, Mr Dykes Campbell:

> He has nothing actually ready for the booksellers, but he has four works so near completion that he has [illegible] more to do than to *transcribe*." The [illegible] only be done by his own hand, for the [illegible] and *Sibylline* leaves, including margins of books and [illegible]." Then, he owes money "to those who [illegible]

need its payment"; and, besides, he is far behindhand in the settlement of his accounts for board and lodging. These pressing needs compel him "to abrogate the name of philosopher and poet, and scribble as fast as he can, for *Blackwood's Magazine*," or (as he has been employed for the last days) "in writing MS. sermons for lazy clergymen, who stipulate that the composition must not be more than respectable, for fear they should be desired to publish the visitation Sermon." "This I have not yet had the courage to do. My soul sickens and my heart sinks." "Of my poetic works, I would fain finish the *Christabel*. Alas! for the proud time when I planned, when I had present to my mind, the materials as well as the scheme of the Hymns entitled Spirit, Sun, Earth, Air, Water, Fire, and Man, and the Epic poem on—what still appears to me the one only fit subject remaining for an Epic poem—Jerusalem besieged and destroyed by Titus."[1]

The only other considerable works that he produced were both in prose—*Aids to Reflection*, published in 1825, and a pamphlet on the *Constitution of the Church and State, according to the ideas of each*, published in 1827. He had the sorrow to see his own weakness of will reproduced in his son Hartley, who, with something of his father's genius, inherited also habits of intemperance, which, in 1820, caused him to be deprived of a Fellowship at Oriel College, Oxford, gained in the previous year. With the exception of one or two lapses Coleridge's own tendencies in this direction seem to have been successfully checked during his residence at Highgate, and his closing years were calm and peaceful. In 1825 he received from George IV. an annuity of £100 as one of the associates of the newly founded Royal Society of Literature, and though this was discontinued by William IV., the loss was made good to him by Hookham Frere, a bounty of £300 being also granted him by the Treasury in 1831. He died on the 25th of July 1834, and was buried in Highgate Churchyard.

In remarkable contrast with the vacillations of Coleridge stand the character and career of his brother-in-law. Southey's mind was essentially practical. Hence, though in his youth he was perhaps more in active sympathy

[1] *The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Edited by James Dykes Campbell.* Introduction, cix.

than either Wordsworth or Coleridge with revolutionary schemes, he was the first to retire from them when he perceived their real meaning. His early marriage imposed on him the necessity of earning a regular livelihood; and unable to reconcile himself to the requirements of the clerical, the medical, or the legal professions, after a brief experience of all three, he resolutely determined to support himself by literature. With this end in view, he sought to turn his ingenuity and acquired learning to the most lucrative account, and made money in any way that he could by writing for booksellers and periodicals. His poems, being less revolutionary in style than those of Coleridge and Wordsworth, obtained a wider popularity, but his main profits came from the prose writings which, in the shape of histories or miscellaneous essays, his well-stored mind was able to produce with speed and abundance. In 1803 the support of Coleridge's family as well as his own came to depend on the labours of his pen, nor did he ever flinch in the face of his double task. Removing in that year to Greta Hall, where his brother-in-law had settled himself, he devoted his time, with an almost mechanical regularity, to the production of books, pamphlets, and magazine articles. As he had long detached himself from his youthful Revolutionary sympathies, he made himself so useful to the Government as to earn in 1806 a pension of £160 a year. In 1808 his position as a leading writer on the Tory side was emphasised by his engagement with the recently founded *Quarterly Review*, his connection with which was steadily maintained till 1839. In 1813 he was appointed to the Laureateship, after it had been declined by Scott, and the somewhat servile character of his utterances in this capacity not unnaturally provoked comments from the Opposition. On the death of George III. he published his *Vision of Judgment*, in the preface to which he made severe reflections on what he called the "Satanic school of poetry," represented by Byron and Shelley, thus laying himself open to the retaliation of the former of these poets in his famous satire of the same name, and to other reflections on his

political apostasy, which had become notorious by the illicit publication in 1817 of his youthful drama, *Wat Tyler.* Southey replied to his assailants, but not very successfully; and from that time forwards he almost entirely abandoned verse composition. In 1839, after the death of his first wife, he married Caroline Bowles, with whom he had long maintained an epistolary correspondence; but his brain had been worn out by its excessive labours, and he died on the 23rd of March 1843, and was buried in Crosthwaite Churchyard. His chief poems were published in the following order: *Joan of Arc,* 1796; *Thalaba,* 1801; *Madoc,* 1805; *The Curse of Kehama,* 1810; *Roderick,* 1814; *Wat Tyler* (surreptitiously), 1817.

These biographical details will help to illustrate the mental processes by which each of the Lake poets formed the character of his metrical compositions. But to obtain a complete view of their influence on the course of English Literature, it is necessary to understand the nature, first, of their relation to the national taste of their era, and then of the general bearing on the art of poetry of their philosophical theories.

Up to the close of the eighteenth century, the course of English Poetry, like that of classical poetry, had been a mirror to what Shakespeare calls "the age and body of the time." The effect of the poetical revolution accomplished by Wordsworth and Coleridge was to remove the sphere of poetry from social action to philosophical reflection, and to exchange the ancient method consisting in the ideal imitation of external objects for an introspective analysis of the impressions of the individual mind. The monuments of this great change can be best studied in the poetry of Wordsworth, but the nature of the change itself and its effects on poetry as an art will be more clearly understood by reference to the criticism of Coleridge.

Coleridge, endowed by nature with the finest faculty of artistic perception, had the further advantage of learning the art of criticism from one who had a perfect understanding of the true uses of classical education. No passages

in his *Biographia Literaria* are more interesting than those in which he describes the method employed in teaching by James Bowyer, his old school-master at Christ's Hospital, whose practice was to make his pupils examine the composition of the best ancient authors, pointing out to them the principles on which it was superior to the work of poets like Ovid and Statius, and its fundamental resemblances to the style of such modern authors as Shakespeare and Milton. Disciplined in this manner, Coleridge soon learned to perceive the radical faults in the work of a poet like Darwin, whose *Botanic Garden*, on the eve of the French Revolution, was at the height of its popularity. But though his judgment had been trained to recognise instinctively the highest standard of æsthetic authority, his precocious metaphysical talent intervened to prevent him from discovering the causes of the vicious tendencies in the taste of his own age. Instead of asking himself whether the mechanical style of Darwin might not be historically traced to an abuse springing out of the decay of some sound hereditary principle, he erected an abstract standard of judgment whereby his own æsthetic dislikes and preferences might be justified on general grounds. Having, for example, conceived an enthusiastic admiration for the Sonnets of Bowles,

> "It was my constant reply," he tells us, "to authorities brought against me from later poets of great name, that no authority could avail in opposition to Truth, Nature, Logic, and the laws of Universal Grammar; actuated too by my former passion for metaphysical investigations, I laboured at a solid foundation on which permanently to ground my opinions, in the component faculties of the human mind itself, and their comparative dignity and importance. *According to the faculty or source, from which* the pleasure given by any poem or passage was derived, I estimated the merit of such poem or passage."[1]

Not recognising that metaphysical principles formed at so immature an age were likely to prove at some point defective, Coleridge proceeded to apply them universally with all the enthusiasm of his impulsive nature. At the

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. i. p. 14.

same time he sought to ground his religious and political opinions on an equally abstract philosophical basis; as a natural consequence, his principles fluctuated in constant ebb and flow. Poetry, metaphysics, morals, and politics mixed themselves for ever in his imagination. His *Religious Musings* and his *Æolian Harp*, read together, show a mind alternating between Unitarianism and Pantheism; the former poem and the *Ode on the Departing Year* reflect the agitations of feeling distracted between disappointment with a Revolution strayed from its anticipated course, and anger at the armed resistance offered by the poet's own country to the aims of that Revolution. The first meeting with Wordsworth convinced Coleridge that, in the profound Nature-worship and the mystical experiences of his new acquaintance, he had at last discovered the "solid foundation" on which he might permanently build his philosophical belief; and the extravagant ardour with which he prostrated himself before the genius of his friend is merely the measure of a proselyte's enthusiasm for the supposed truths of a new revelation. It is evident that, when the scheme of *Lyrical Ballads* was first formed, Coleridge accepted without question all the fundamental principles of Wordsworth's practice, whether exemplified in poems like *Tintern Abbey* or in the class typified by *The Idiot Boy*. As he says in *Biographia Literaria*:

> During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination.[1]

Out of those conversations was evolved the theory of Poetical Creation, expounded in the Preface to the Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), in the Preface to the edition of Wordsworth's Poems published in 1815, and in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. In this theory is to be found the basis of departure for the Revolutionary movement originated by the Lake School, as opposed to the

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. ii. p. 1.

Classical principles by which the Art of Poetry had been hitherto regulated.

Creation in Poetry, as conceived by Wordsworth and Coleridge, meant the revelation to the world, by the imagination of the poet, of the unseen life in Nature. The æsthetic problem to be solved was, according to them, primarily a metaphysical, not a technical question; not, What are the limits of the Art of Poetry? but, What is the Poet? and What are the functions of the Poet's imagination?

"My own conclusions, on the nature of poetry in the strictest sense of the word," writes Coleridge, "have been in part anticipated in some of the remarks on the Fancy and Imagination. What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with What is a poet?—that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other. For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind."[1]

The answer to Coleridge's latter question, which he himself does not make very clear, is supplied by Wordsworth:

Taking up the subject then upon general grounds, let us ask What is meant by the word Poet. What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself. And what language is to be expected from him? He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common

passions as manifested in the goings on of the Universe, and *habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.*[2]

To bring this impulse to effect is the work of the poet's imagination:

"The processes of Imagination," says Wordsworth, "are carried on either by conferring additional properties upon an object, or abstracting from it some of those which it actually possesses, and thus enabling it to react upon the mind which hath performed the process, like a new existence."[3]

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1 *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. ii. p. [illegible]

2 Preface to 2nd edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, 18[illegible].

3 Preface to edition of *Collected Poems of Wordsworth*, [illegible].

And so Coleridge in his vein of German transcendentalism:

The Imagination I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition, in the finite mind, of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.[1]

The imaginative process thus defined is illustrated by what Wordsworth says in *The Prelude* of his early intercourse with Nature:

A plastic power
Abode with me, a forming hand, at times
Rebellious, acting in a devious mood;
A local spirit of his own, at war
With general tendency, but, for the most,
Subservient strictly to external things
With which it communed. An auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,
The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on,
Murmuring so sweetly, in themselves obeyed
A like dominion, and the midnight storm
Grew darker in the presence of my eye.[2]

This power, he tells us, was long neutralised in him, by his political and social theorising, but in time

I shook the habit off
Entirely and for ever, and again
In Nature's presence stood, as now I stand,
A sensitive being, a *creative* soul.[3]

Evidently, then, up to the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, and for some time after, Wordsworth and Coleridge were agreed in regarding Poetry as a kind of philosophy, or

[1] *Biographia Literaria*, vol. i. pp. 297-98.
[2] *The Prelude*, Book ii. [3] *Ibid.* Book xii.

even a religion, the truths of which were revealed to the world by the imagination of the poet. Wordsworth, accepting with complacency the enthusiastic homage paid by Coleridge, both to his moral view of Nature and to his poetical genius, became more and more firmly convinced of the truth of his inspiration. But in Coleridge, as was usual with him, the believing mood gradually evaporated. His own incapacity to persevere in the path of austere morality prescribed by his master was accompanied (as he himself confesses in the poem called *Dejection*) by a fading sense of the religious truths revealed in Nature; and both poets became conscious of a growing estrangement in their intellectual sympathies, a feeling that was soon aggravated in Coleridge by what he considered personal grievance. While the perception of the change was recorded by Wordsworth in the lines entitled "A Complaint," Coleridge confided to pocket-books and other memoranda his doubts as to principles which he had in the first place accepted as infallible. Thus about the year 1805 he makes the following entry:

> The thinking disease is that in which the feelings, instead of embodying themselves in acts, ascend and become materials of general reasoning and intellectual pride. The dreadful consequences of this perversion may be instanced in Germany, *e.g.* in Fichte *versus* Kant, Schelling *v.* Fichte, and in Verbidigno [Wordsworth] *v.* S. T. C * * *. On such meagre diet as feelings, evaporated embryos in their progress to birth, no moral being ever becomes healthy.

And at a later date, alluding to the metaphysical aid given by himself to Wordsworth, he says:

> I have loved with enthusiastic self-oblivion those who have been well pleased that I should, year after year, flow with a hundred nameless rills into *their* main stream.

While the belief that poetry is a religious revelation of Nature weakened in Coleridge's mind, his critical sense of Wordsworth's defects in the practice of his *art* became more acute. The latter, with perfect logical consistency,

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had deduced from his own principles certain practical conclusions. The ideas which he himself derived from his observation not only of clouds, trees, and mountains, but of the personal objects, men and women, whom he met in his solitary communings with Nature, became the exclusive matter of his imaginative thought, and—(pleased as he was "with his own passions and volitions, and rejoicing more than other men at the spirit of life that was in him") —furnished him on the slightest occasion with subjects for poetry. As he says:

> The dragon's wing, the magic ring,
> I shall not covet for my dower,
> If I along that lowly way
> With sympathetic heart may stray,
> And with a soul of power.[1]

On the same principle it followed that the reader's imagination must be content to pursue the line of abstract thought disclosed to him by the poet, without restricting the liberty of the poet by any conditions of its own. To the question of the reader of *Simon Lee*, for example, When was the tale to begin? the poet replies:

> O Reader, had you in your mind
> Such stores as silent thought can bring,
> O gentle Reader, you would find
> A tale in every thing.
> What more I have to say is short,
> And you must kindly take it:
> It is no tale; but *should you think*,
> Perhaps a tale you'll make it.

As regards expression, since poetry was primarily a philosophy, the end of which was the revelation of truth, it seemed to be a logical consequence, as Wordsworth argued, that "poetical diction" should follow the same analytical order as philosophical prose, metre being merely an addition to it for the purpose of making the style of the poet more agreeable.

Principles of this kind tended to revolutionise the

[1] *Wordsworth's Poetical Works*, "Peter Bell." Compare Tasso's views as to epic poetry, Vol. V. pp. 7-8.

whole practice of poetry. The first principle of poetry, as illustrated in the work of the great classical masters of the art, had been that the germs of poetical life and order exist in the poetical *subject*—the "res lecta potenter" of Horace—quite apart from the imagination of the poet. The wrath of Achilles was a fit subject of song independently of the particular manner in which it was treated in the *Iliad*: the general belief in Heaven and Hell, together with the reasoning of the Scholastic Doctors on the subject, preceded the composition of *The Divine Comedy*: the dramatic situations in the stories of Hamlet, King Lear, and Othello were in existence before Shakespeare used them for the purposes of tragedy. Matter of this kind had certain inherent qualities, rendering it more capable of rousing general emotion when expressed in verse than in prose; the disturbing nature of the emotion experienced exacted in the expression an order in the words different from that of prose and peculiar to the conditions of metre. The act of creation, as far as the poet was concerned, consisted in giving to the subject-matter the highest form it was capable of receiving; the final judgment as to the excellence and propriety of the form created by the poet—a matter that could only be determined by time—lay with the audience or the reader, as being the persons whom it was the aim of the poet to please. Wordsworth's reasoning, on the contrary, was an unconscious justification of the mystical eccentricity of Blake. To him the sole important matter in poetry was the vision in his own mind; and he considered that the poet had a right to be indignant with his readers if they did not see the vision as clearly as himself.

The critical attitude of Coleridge towards the classical principle, on the one hand, and towards Wordsworth's theory of poetry, on the other, as far as it is defined in his *Biographia Literaria*, is curiously inconsistent. Having come to perceive that poetry must be regarded rather as an art than as a philosophy, he recognised also that, as its aim was to produce pleasure in other minds besides that of the poet himself, there must be a pre-existing

idea of poetry in the imagination of the audience as well as in that of the poet.

"If," he says, "the definition sought for be that of a *legitimate* poem, I answer it must be one, the parts of which mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonising with, and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement."[1]

While the classical poets and critics taught that the metrical arrangement of words flowed naturally from the imagination of the poet, when rightly inspired by a subject capable of rousing the imagination of the reader, Wordsworth insisted that any subject might be made poetical by the imagination of the poet; and, at the time when *Lyrical Ballads* was published, Coleridge agreed with him in approving poems of the class of *Alice Fell, The Idiot Boy, Goody Blake and Harry Gill, etc.* When, however, Wordsworth published the Preface in which he maintained that there was no essential difference between the *language* of poetry and prose, Coleridge at once parted company with him. Bowyer had taught him so truly to appreciate the manly spirit and character embodied in the work of the best classical poets, that he had early detected the false principles of the Darwinian school of poetry, which sought to disguise its lack of genuine inspiration by dressing up its diction in an artificial style intended to produce an appearance different from the language of prose. He could not fail to perceive, on the other hand, that the diction in a very large number of Wordsworth's poems was unsuitable to the requirements of metre; but, being prevented by his own reasoning from arguing that this fault was inseparably connected with a defective choice of subject, he fell back on the theory that metrical composition is dependent on abstract laws of its own. His examination of Wordsworth's poetical practice in the light of that poet's own principles is preceded by a metaphysical argument, in which he attempts to explain historically the contrast between the

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. i. p. 14.

style of European poetry at the period of the Classical Renaissance and the style of his own contemporaries.

"Christendom," he says, "from its first settlement on feudal rights has been so far one great body, however imperfectly organised, that a similar spirit will be found in each period to have been acting in all its members."[1]

If the meaning in this sentence were only what seems to be carried on the face of it—that the different countries of Christian Europe have been simultaneously stirred by great common movements, such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Revolution—it might of course pass without question; such at least has been the principle on which the gradual evolution of English Poetry has been traced in this History. But Coleridge proceeds to show his real meaning to be, that the Renaissance produced *similar literary effects* at the same time in *all* European languages; that the same can be said of the literary phenomena produced by the French Revolution; and that the Renaissance style, common to all European literatures, stands in sharp contrast with the later European style common to them all at the era of the French Revolution. Neither of these propositions can, I think, be historically maintained. As to the Renaissance, Coleridge takes for his type of that style the poetry of Italy in the sixteenth century, which he exemplifies by a Madrigal of Giambattista Strozzi, and characterises as follows:

The imagery is almost always general: sun, moon, flowers, breezes, murmuring streams, warbling songsters, delicious shades, lovely damsels, cruel as fair, nymphs, naiads, and goddesses, are the materials which are common to all, and which each shaped and arranged according to his judgment or fancy, little solicitous to add or to particularise.[2]

Such indeed is an accurate description of most of the *Italian* poetry produced after the Council of Trent, and, as I have already shown, variously illustrated in the work of Marino, Chiabrera, and Testi.[3] But in what sense can

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol ii. p 20
[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 23.
[3] Vol. V pp 9-12.

the description be said to apply to *English* poetical work produced during the period defined by Coleridge, viz. "from the birth to the death of Shakespeare," a period which includes *The Faery Queen* and the finest productions of the Elizabethan drama? The character of English poetry during that epoch differs as totally from the style of the contemporary Italian poetry as the general life of a free though semi-barbarous nation differs from the manners of a people living in a state of refined servitude.

Nor can it be said that Coleridge's account of the general character of poetry in the age of the French Revolution is free from confusion. He says:

> In the present age the poet . . . seems to propose to himself as his main object, and as that which is the most characteristic of his art, new and striking images; with incidents that interest the affections or excite the curiosity. Both his characters and his descriptions he renders, as much as possible, specific and individual, even to a degree of portraiture.[1]

So far he would seem to be describing the poetry of Wordsworth, but he goes on:

> In his diction and metre, on the other hand, he is comparatively careless, and acknowledges no justifying principle but that of the writer's convenience; or else some mechanical movement is adopted, of which one couplet or stanza is so far an adequate specimen, as that the occasional differences appear evidently to arise from accident, or the qualities of the language itself, not from meditation and an intelligent purpose.[2]

Though it might be truly said that poets of the school of Wordsworth were "comparatively careless," and poets of Darwin's school were "mechanical," in their management of metre, nevertheless no illuminating conclusion could be reached by contrasting either of the mutually opposing English styles with the style of the Italian poets of the sixteenth century. On the contrary, it seems to be plain that, while the characteristics of the Darwinian style are in many respects identical with those of the late Italian poets as described by Coleridge himself—both of these being the products of the declining power of the Classical

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. ii. p. 21

[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 21.

Renaissance—the individualism and careless composition, noted by him as features in the work of Wordsworth's disciples, are reflections of the anarchy of the French Revolution. Coleridge, however, thought that the qualities he admired in the classical style could be combined with the leading characteristics of the Wordsworthian manner:

> "A lasting and enviable reputation," he says, "awaits that man of genius, who should attempt, and realise, a union;—who should recall the high finish, the appropriateness, the facility, the delicate proportion, and above all the perfusive and omnipresent grace, which have preserved, as in a shrine of precious amber, the Sparrow of Catullus, the Swallow, the Grasshopper, and all the other little loves of Anacreon; and which with bright though diminished glories, revisited the youth and early manhood of Christian Europe, in the vales of Arno and the groves of Isis and Cam;—and who with these should combine the keener interest, deeper pathos, manlier reflection, and the fresher and more various imagery, which give a value and a name that will not pass away to the poets who have done honour to our own times and to those of our predecessors."[1]

Wordsworth was so far impressed with Coleridge's reasoning on the character of his diction that, in the later editions of his poems, he made repeated efforts—as in *Beggars*, *Gipsies*, *The Highland Boy*, *etc.*—to remove the prosaic baldness of diction to which his friend called attention. Yet the general effect remains unaltered, and the unprejudiced reader who examines the poems of the *Alice Fell* class in their final shape will see that their prosaic character lies, not merely in the style of expression, but also in the mode of conception: it proceeds from that same analytic process of the Imagination which Wordsworth and Coleridge call poetic *creation*. For the effect of this is, that in the *poem*, where the reader desires to be carried out of himself into a perfectly ideal atmosphere, he can never get rid of the incongruous self-consciousness arising out of the didactic presence of the *poet*. Charles Lamb, in criticising to Wordsworth the second edition

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. ii. p. 24.

of *Lyrical Ballads*, lays his finger, with his usual acuteness, on the true nature of the artistic error, which Coleridge's metaphysics only served to obscure:

I will just add that it appears to me a fault in the *Beggar* that the instructions conveyed in it are too direct, and like a lecture: *they don't slide into the mind of the reader while he is imagining no such matter.* An intelligent reader finds a sort of insult in being told, "I will teach you how to think upon this subject."[1]

In fact, those numerous poems of Wordsworth in which the dominant note appears to be the analysis of feeling by the poet himself, without the reader's co-operation, fail to satisfy Coleridge's excellent definition of a legitimate poem, viz.: "one, the parts of which mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonising with and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement."

This is the main point for consideration in the principle of the Revolution—for such it evidently is—in the art of Poetry, aimed at by the authors of *Lyrical Ballads.* In the Preface to the edition of his Poems of 1815, Wordsworth, after enumerating the faculties of the Poet, and repeating his theory as to the powers of Imagination and Fancy, recognised—as he had never done before—that the liberties of the Imagination were subject to certain Laws of Form.

"The materials of Poetry," he says, "by these powers collected and produced are cast by means of various moulds into divers *forms.*"

The moulds which he proceeds to enumerate are in fact no other than the well-known divisions of poetry, the Epic, the Dramatic, the Lyric, and the Idyllic and Didactic forms. Wordsworth attempted metrical composition on his own principles in all these varieties. He used the form of the drama in *The Borderers*, in order to give a poetic demonstration of the falsity of Godwin's moral teaching. But had this play been ever put upon the stage, the theatre would have emptied during the First

[1] *Letters of Charles Lamb* (Ainger), vol. i. p. 176.

Half rural Sadler's Wells? Though at that time
Intolerant, as is the way of youth
Unless itself be pleased, here more than once
Taking my seat, I saw (nor blush to add,
With ample recompense) giants and dwarfs,
Clowns, conjurors, posture masters, harlequins,
Amid the uproar of the rabblement,
Perform their feats. Nor was it mean delight
To watch crude Nature work in untaught minds;
To note the laws and progress of belief;
Though obstinate on this way, yet on that
How willingly we travel, and how far!
To have, for instance, brought upon the scene
The champion, Jack the Giant-killer: Lo!
He dons his coat of darkness, on the stage
Walks, and achieves his wonders, from the eye
Of living Mortal covert, "as the moon
Hid in her vacant interlunar Cave."
Delusion bold! and how can it be wrought?
The garb he wears is black as death, the word
"Invisible" flames forth upon his chest.[1]

When John Philips uses Miltonic rhythms to elevate the triviality of his theme in *The Splendid Shilling*, or when Cowper, in his description of the making of the cucumber frame, writes: "The stable yields a stercoraceous heap," the mock-heroic style serves the artistic purpose; but the same style, employed by a superior mind, self-consciously analysing its own impressions of the amusements of the vulgar (even granting the intention to be humorous), excites anything but pleasure.

It was in the Lyric class of poetry alone that a personality so intense as that of Wordsworth could find just scope for the purposes of creation; and, moving in this atmosphere, his genius has abundantly enriched the language with beautiful and characteristic works of metrical art. But the "creation" here was not of the kind contemplated in his Preface of 1800. On the contrary, it is particularly from poems deliberately composed on the principles there defined that Coleridge selects those examples of prosaic diction to which he takes exception. In *The Thorn*, *The Sailor's Mother*, *Resolution and Independence*, *The Idiot Boy*, *etc.*, the

[1] *The Prelude*, Book vii.

Those fields, those hills—what could they less?—had laid
Strong hold on his affections, *were to him*
A pleasurable feeling of blind love,
The pleasure which there is in life itself.

Why should the poet anticipate, and therefore rebuke, any question in the reader's mind about the truth of these influences? Is not the reason obviously because, in the character of his ideal Shepherd, Wordsworth is recalling and defending *his own* impressions of Nature?[1]

Self-consciousness dictates not only the range of feeling but also the mode of diction in those of his poems which have an epic or idyllic character. Coleridge, specifying the various classes of faults to be noted in Wordsworth's style, includes among them, very justly, what he calls "mental bombast, as distinguished from verbal," and illustrates his meaning by citing the poem entitled "Gipsies."[2] But he makes no mention of the *verbal* bombast to which, in the face of his own theory, Wordsworth is so often driven by the felt necessity of elevating descriptions of common things into accordance with the semi-Miltonic character of his metre. The incongruity of style, as is natural, most frequently makes itself felt in *The Prelude*, and may be exemplified from the narrative of his life in London:

Add to these exhibitions, mute and still,
Others of wider scope, where living men,
Music, and shifting pantomimic scenes,
Diversified the allurement. Need I fear
To mention by its name, as in degree
Lowest of these and humblest in attempt,
Yet richly graced with honours of her own,

[1] Compare the lines in *The Excursion* describing the boyhood of the Pedlar, which are evidently a reflection of Wordsworth's own transports in the presence of Nature.

His spirit drank
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,
And by them did he live; they were his life.

See also *The Prelude*, Book i.: lines beginning "Ye Presences of Nature, etc."

[2] *Biographia Literaria* (1907), vol. ii. pp. 109-10.

Half-rural Sadler's Wells? Though at that time
Intolerant, as is the way of youth
Unless itself be pleased, here more than once
Taking my seat, I saw (nor blush to add,
With ample recompense) giants and dwarfs,
Clowns, conjurors, posture masters, harlequins,
Amid the uproar of the rabblement,
Perform their feats. Nor was it mean delight
To watch crude Nature work in untaught minds;
To note the laws and progress of belief;
Though obstinate on this way, yet on that
How willingly we travel, and how far!

. . . .

Walks, and achieves his wonders, from the eye
Of living Mortal covert, "as the moon
Hid in her vacant interlunar Cave."
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[1] *The Prelude*, Book vii.

presence of the poet predominates over the form of the poem: he is felt to be endeavouring to teach the reader the inner meaning of common objects by the power of his own Imagination. He describes particular things, of which the reader knows nothing, with a minuteness which destroys all sense of unity and proportion. We are told what was the exact appearance of the Sailor's Mother and the old Leech-gatherer, and the precise words in which they answered the questions of the poet; how many yards the Thorn he describes is from the mountain path; and how many raps Betty Foy gave at the doctor's door. No known form of metrical composition is capable of idealising details of this kind: hence the effect produced is that of garrulous babble. But, in those of Wordsworth's lyrical poems on the beauty of which all are agreed, the personality of the poet is either entirely suppressed, or is so merged in the universality of the emotion to which he gives expression, as not to break in on the sense of metrical unity.

The large range of emotion which he is able to express poetically is seen in the variety of the metrical forms which he employs—the Ballad and octosyllabic metres; the Ode; and (above all) the Sonnet. The first class is of course employed as a vehicle for the simplest kind of feeling, and the most perfect example of it is the very beautiful *Lucy Gray*, which has all the tender charm of Blake's poem *The Little Girl Lost*[1] without its mystical extravagance. With it may be grouped those numerous short flights of song where expression is given to some simple feeling of the poet's own, which at once strikes a corresponding note in the hearts of his audience; for example, "She dwelt among untrodden ways," "My heart leaps up when I behold, etc.," "She was a phantom of delight," the *Ode to the Cuckoo*, *The Fountain*, *Yarrow Unvisited*, and many others, in none of which is there any didactic obtrusion of the poet's personality on the reader; in all of which, on the contrary, the parts of the poem "mutually support and explain each other;

[1] See ante, pp. 81-2.

all in their proportion harmonising with and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement."

Higher in the poetic scale stands the Ode, the matter of which is of a more lofty and intellectual kind, involving spiritual perception and reflection, such as that contained in the famous *Ode on Immortality*, the *Ode to Duty*, the *Song in Brougham Castle*, or the beautiful address (1804) *To the Small Celandine*. There we find no attempt to alter the appearance of objects in the crucible of the poet's imagination, that faculty being rather employed to draw out thoughts which all can see to be inherent in the subject, and to embody them in metre of which the diction, at once severe, sublime, and accordant with tradition, illustrates the true spirit of classical poetry. A perfect example of this class is found in the verses to the Skylark, a composition of the most refined art, combining, perhaps beyond any English poem, the elegance of the Greek epigram with the purity of Christian sentiment:

Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!
Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?
Or while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground?
Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
Those quivering wings composed, that music still!

Leave to the nightingale her shady wood;
A privacy of glorious light is thine;
Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
Of harmony with instinct more divine;
Type of the wise, who soar but never roam,
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!

In this class, moreover, may be included those enthusiastic outbursts of admiration for the grander phenomena of Nature (resembling in character the lines on *Tintern Abbey*, or *Yew Trees*) which occur at intervals in *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*, and which, being of a lyrical nature, and in no way an integral part of the narrative, can be easily detached from their prosaic context. Equally classical in conception and expression is the noble poem of *Laodamia*, which, imagined in a spirit completely opposed to that generally prevailing in *Lyrical*

Ballads, presents a style in direct antithesis to the rustic colloquialism prescribed in the Preface of 1800; witness the grand abruptness of the inversions in the opening lines:

> With sacrifice before the rising morn
> Vows have I made by fruitless hope inspired;
> And from the infernal Gods, 'mid shades forlorn
> Of night, my slaughtered lord have I required:
> Celestial pity I again implore;—
> Restore him to my sight—great Jove, restore.

But the class of lyric which probably most readily lent itself as an instrument to Wordsworth's genius was the Sonnet. Coleridge justly notes as a characteristic in his poetry, admitted even by hostile critics, "the sinewy strength of single lines and paragraphs." For this effect the structure of the sonnet was peculiarly well adapted, as being the most highly individualised of all metrical forms. Confined within a limit of fourteen lines, it admits of no superfluity, while at the same time the disposition of the rhymes allows much permutation and combination. Many generations of poets in all European countries have used it for various purposes, and, in its most conventional form, I have often had occasion to show how its amorous conceits reflect the decay of mediæval chivalry. But great representatives of the Classical Renaissance, Michael Angelo and Milton, had turned it to account for the expression of philosophical, religious, or political thought; and Wordsworth, following in their track, made it a vehicle for the still more complex moods,

> Produced as lonely Nature, or the strife
> That animates the scenes of public life,
> Inspired.

By composing on these lines he learned the true secret of that artistic self-restraint which, in *Lyrical Ballads* and the Preface of 1800, he seems to treat with scant respect:

> Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room;
> And hermits are contented with their cells;
> And students with their pensive citadels;
> Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,
> Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,
> High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,
> Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:

In truth the prison, unto which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me
In sundry moods 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

The first fruit of his invention was the unrivalled Sonnet conceived on Westminster Bridge in 1802; and, having once realised his command over it, he made the sonnet his favourite form of metrical composition. Yielding indeed to the temptation of overvaluing his own thoughts, he too often employed the metre mechanically; and a more judicious selection of subject-matter would probably have reduced his two or three hundred sonnets to the same number as Milton's; but the quality of this residuum ranks with the work of the author of *Paradise Lost.* Of those that were inspired by "lonely Nature" the beauty may be measured by the comparatively little-known lines on the River Duddon, describing the changing moods of a mountain stream:

The old inventive Poets, had they seen,
Or rather felt, the entrancement that detains
Thy waters, Duddon! 'mid these flowery plains;
The still repose, the liquid lapse serene,
Transferred to bowers imperishably green,
Had beautified Elysium! But these chains
Will soon be broken; a rough course remains,
Rough as the past; where Thou of placid mien,
Innocuous as a firstling of the flock,
And countenanced like a soft cerulean sky,
Shalt change thy temper; and, with many a shock,
Given and received in mutual jeopardy,
Dance, like a Bacchanal, from rock to rock,
Tossing her frantic thyrsus wide and high!

The political and social Sonnets are for the most part inspired either by events of a nature fitted to strike the general imagination, such as "the extinction of the Venetian Republic," "the subjugation of Switzerland," "the fears of invasion," or by a sense of the evils produced in society through excessive luxury and selfishness, as in the lines beginning, "The world is too much with

us, etc.," and the series entitled "London 1802." Here though the poet occupies a pulpit—a place for which Wordsworth always seems to feel that he has a special call—he is well in touch with the conscience of his hearers, and the lofty rhetoric with which he seeks to move them is inspired by just principles of art.

Wordsworth's Sonnet is, as a rule, kept strictly within the traditional Italian lines. He avoids the three loose quatrains with the rhyming couplet at the close, used by the Elizabethan poets; and generally maintaining the compact rhyming structure of the first eight lines, finds his liberty in the distribution of the six closing ones. He is not careful to make a pause after the eighth line, but lets his thought run on, if necessary, to the end, trusting to one of those lines of "sinewy strength" which characterise his style and give the required effect both of emphasis and repose. A rhyming close is rarely found in his Sonnets.

Apart from his theory of the modifying power of Imagination, Coleridge's poetical genius moved in a sphere as different as possible from that of Wordsworth. When he was in health and spirits his mind, essentially active and (in the old sense of the word) creative, was always seeking to embody its impulses in some external form, whether this took the shape of a scheme of Pantisocracy, a metaphysical speculation, or an attack on the policy of the Government. He was never content with those moods of passive self-absorption, afterwards expressed in verse by an effort of introspective analysis, which Wordsworth describes in his poem called *Personal Talk*:

> Better than such discourse doth silence long,
> Long barren silence, square with my desire;
> To sit without emotion, hope, or aim,
> In the loved presence of my cottage-fire,
> And listen to the flapping of the flame,
> Or kettle whispering its faint undersong.

Hence, in the poetical partnership of *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge's business was of course to deal "with incidents

and agents that were to be in part at least supernatural"—the element of "the dragon's wing, the magic ring" that Wordsworth, in his own department, thought he could dispense with. Whatever effects of marvel and mystery could still be communicated to the reader, through the imagination of the poet, depended upon psychical experience; and within this region no man had ever higher qualifications to exercise poetical dominion than Coleridge. He was a dreamer of dreams, which had for him such vividness of reality, that the only necessity of art left for his invention was a form to serve as the channel of connection between the imaginations of himself and the reader.

The artistic difficulty lay in producing, out of such inward experiences, the sense of ideal unity; and once only in a long narrative poem did Coleridge succeed in discovering the poetical form necessary for this effect. But the fruit of that inspiration was *The Ancient Mariner*. In this wonderful poem the reader's imagination is carried into an ideal region where, nevertheless, all the incidents and feelings are so intensely realised that they never fail to seem natural. The foundation of it, we are told, was a dream of Coleridge's friend Cruikshank, in which he saw a ship navigated by dead men. To connect this with the idea of the living world a certain moral element was wanted; and this was suggested by Wordsworth, who had been reading Shelvocke's *Voyages*, in which is recorded the slaying of an Albatross. Into the groundwork suggested to him by his friend, Coleridge wrought a labyrinth of various images, derived some from picturesque appearances in natural objects—many of these observed by Dorothy Wordsworth—some from incidents recorded in books of travel, and some from his own fancy. All these materials are fused by imagination into a consistent whole, life being given to them by that magical, almost supernatural, music of metre of which Coleridge alone possessed the secret. The manner of the ballad style is adapted with admirable judgment to the character of the narrative. When *The Ancient Mariner* was first written, many obsolete words

and quaintnesses of spelling were introduced into it, obviously with a view of producing an antique effect; but these affectations were afterwards removed, without any injury to the general cast. It is indeed necessary for the reader who would thoroughly enjoy the poem to surrender his imagination absolutely to the guidance of the poet; and nothing testifies more clearly to the dominantly ethical tendency in taste through the eighteenth century than the reluctance of the critics to grant the poetical postulates of the author. Southey spoke of *The Ancient Mariner* as a poem aiming at a species of "Dutch sublimity." Wordsworth (who had at first intended to lend a hand to the composition, but soon found that it was quite out of his line) criticised it patronisingly on prosaic and rationalising principles, which mainly serve to bring into relief the radical differences in the genius of the two authors of *Lyrical Ballads*:

> The poem of my Friend has indeed great defects: first, that the principal person has no distinct character, either in his profession of Mariner, or as a human being, who, having been long under the control of supernatural impressions, might be supposed himself to partake of something supernatural; secondly, that he does not act but is continually acted upon; thirdly, that the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other; and lastly, that the imagery is somewhat too laboriously accumulated.

Coleridge condescended to the lack of sympathetic imagination in his audience so far as to style *The Ancient Mariner* in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* "a poetical reverie"; exciting thereby the just indignation of Charles Lamb, who, alone among the professional critics of the time, seems to have recognised the conditions under which the poem ought to be judged.

It fulfils indeed all those conditions of unity which Coleridge's definition requires in "a legitimate poem"; offering in this respect a striking contrast to *Christabel*, the only other extensive monument (for *Kubla Khan* is the merest fragment) of Coleridge's *creative* powers. He was always talking of his intention to complete *Christabel*,

and declared that, at the outset, he had the scheme of the entire poem in his imagination; the reader, however, may congratulate himself that he made no attempt to bring the story to a conclusion, since he could only have succeeded in destroying that very effect on which the beauty of the fragment depends. What explanation of the real nature of Geraldine would have satisfied expectant curiosity? How could any regular *dénouement* have been wrought out of "events which, having no necessary connection, do not produce each other"? The art of the poem—as in the parallel case of *Kubla Khan*—lies in the skill with which the sense of mystery in the action is associated with the picturesque distinctness of the imagery, and with the weird movement of the metre, suggesting to the imagination possibilities incapable of being definitely realised.

Who does not feel, in lines like the following, that Coleridge was haunted by images and rhythms that came into his mind, after the manner of dreams, from the memory of impressions he had derived from Nature, or else by ideas and phrases which stimulated his invention in the books that he read?

> The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
> It covers but not hides the sky.

Or

> There is not wind enough to twirl
> The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
> That dances as often as dance it can,
> Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
> On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

Or

> When the lady passed, there came
> A tongue of light, a fit of flame;
> And Christabel saw the lady's eye,
> And nothing else saw she thereby,
> Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall,
> Which hung in a murky old niche of the wall.

Or

> The chamber carved so curiously,
> Carved with figures strange and sweet,
> All made out of the carver's brain,
> For a lady's chamber meet:
> The lamp with twofold silver chain
> Is fastened to an angel's feet

In effects like these we see the tendency in the art of poetry to approximate to the art of music; and this is indeed manifest in all the most characteristic poems of Coleridge. It appears equally in *The Sigh*, *The Circassian Love Chaunt*, *Moriens Superstiti*, *The Knight's Grave*, *The Pains of Sleep*, *Kubla Khan*, *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter*, and in those very characteristic, but less known, retrospective lines, written towards the reposeful close of his life, and called *Youth and Age*:

> Verse, a breeze mid blossoms straying,
> Where Hope clung feeding like a bee,
> Both were mine! Life went a-maying
> With Nature, Hope, and Poesy,
> When I was young!
>
> *When* I was young?—Ah woful *When*,
> Ah! for the change 'twixt Now and Then!
> This breathing house not built with hands,
> This body that does me grievous wrong,
> O'er aery cliff and glittering sands
> How lightly *then* it flashed along:—
> Like those trim skiffs unknown of yore,
> On winding lakes and rivers wide,
> That ask no aid of sail or oar,
> That fear no spite of wind or tide!
> Nought cared this body for wind or weather,
> When Youth and I lived in't together.
>
> Flowers are lovely; Love is flower-like;
> Friendship is a sheltering tree;
> O! the joys that came down shower-like,
> Of Friendship, Love, and Liberty,
> Ere I was old!
>
> *Ere* I was old? Ah woful Ere,
> Which tells me, Youth's no longer here!
> O Youth! for years so many and sweet,
> 'Tis known that Thou and I were one,
> I'll think it but a fond conceit—
> It cannot be that Thou art gone!
> Thy vesper-bell hath not yet toll'd
> And thou wert aye a masker bold!
> What strange disguise hast now put on,
> To *make believe* that thou art gone?
> I see these locks in silvery slips,
> This drooping gait, this altered size;

But Spring-tide blossoms on thy lips,
And tears take sunshine from thine eyes!
Life is but thought: so think I will
That Youth and I are housemates still.

Dew-drops are the gems of morning,
But the tears of mournful eve!
Where no hope is life's a warning
That only serves to make us grieve,
When we are old:
That only serves to make us grieve
With oft and tedious taking leave,
Like some poor nigh-related guest,
That may not rudely be dismist;
Yet hath outstayed his welcome while,
And tells the jest without the smile.

In these strangely pathetic lines, as in all Coleridge's most characteristic poems, may be noted the play of a fancy Shakespearean in its quality. What he lacked, for the purposes of the highest art, was the grandeur and strength of sane common sense, by which Shakespeare always remained in touch with the demands of his audience. "Of imagination all compact," Coleridge, quivering with sensibility, was for ever seeking to realise his dreams in the world, and as often found his hopes destroyed by physical pain, estrangement from friends, domestic uncongeniality, and his own indolence and irresolution; under stress of which his creative faculty gradually withered, after the manner described by himself in the interesting lines appended to the dialogue called *The Improvisatore*:

Yes, yes! that boon, life's richest treat,
He had, or fancied that he had,
Say, 'twas but in his own conceit—
The fancy made him glad!
Crown of his cup and garnish of his dish!

. . . .

But e'en the meteor offspring of his brain
Unnourished wane;
Faith asks her daily bread
And Fancy must be fed!

Now so it chanced—from wet or dry,
It boots not how—I know not why—
She missed her wonted food; and quickly
Poor Fancy staggered and grew sickly.
Then came a restless state, 'twixt yea and nay,
His faith was fixed, his heart all ebb and flow;
Or like a bark in some half-sheltered bay,
Above its anchor driving to and fro.

That boon, which but to have possess'd
In a *belief* gave life a zest—
Uncertain both what it *had been*,
And if by error lost or luck;
And what it *was*;—an evergreen
Which some insidious blight had struck,
Or annual flower, which, past its blow,
No vernal spell shall e'er revive;
Uncertain, and afraid to know,
  Doubts tossed him to and fro:
Hope keeping Love, Love Hope alive,
Like babes bewildered in a snow,
That cling and huddle from the cold
In hollow tree or ruined fold.

When an imagination so little qualified to master impulses from without addressed itself to the work of the regular drama, it was almost inevitable that it should fail in the severe purpose required of sustained poetic creation. Coleridge's drama *Osorio* is genuinely dramatic in its main conception, and its temporary success, when acted as *Remorse* on the stage of Drury Lane, shows that, with the aid of scenery and good acting, it possessed qualities capable of pleasing spectators in a theatre. It is indeed full of eloquent and striking passages, which must have been heard with admiration; and it is only in examining the structure of the play that we discern the essentially fragmentary action of the dramatic invention. The idea of a tragedy arising out of the relation between two brothers, one of whom has deprived the other by fraud both of his inheritance and his wife, is capable of being presented in an ideal series of connected incidents. But in Coleridge's treatment of the subject the probabilities of action count for little: the whole strength of his imagination is thrown into a psychological rendering of

the states of mind produced by remorse in the fraudulent brother and his chief accomplice: the machinery of the plot is of a kind which would hardly have satisfied the slender requirements of a second-rate Elizabethan melodrama.

Southey, as a poet, had some of the characteristics both of Coleridge and Wordsworth. Like the former he was an omnivorous reader. Possessed, like Wordsworth, with an intense desire to mark his originality as a poet, he drew for his materials on books with as much persistency as the other had recourse to impressions made by Nature on his own mind. His intellectual curiosity was immense, and he roved through literature with all the industry of a bee collecting honey. But he lacked equally the lyrical faculty aroused in Wordsworth by the intensity of his emotions, and the creative fancy by which Coleridge, in flashes of inspiration, reveals glimpses of a supernatural world. Southey's was a scientific rather than a poetical imagination. As he says of himself:

> Sometimes I soar, where Fancy guides the rein,
>   Beyond this visible diurnal sphere:
> But most, with long and self-approving pain,
>   Patient pursue the historian's task severe.[1]

The result is, that, in the long quasi-epics which he so industriously composed, the poem always seems to resemble a portico or ante-chapel to the explanatory Notes.

Thalaba and *The Curse of Kehama*, for example, evidently owe their being to the interest in Oriental life and literature excited by the writings of Sir William Jones and French travellers. *Madoc* and *Roderick* are the fruits of early travels in Spain, and of a wide, if superficial, acquaintance with Spanish and Portuguese literature—a literary harvest ripened by the public attention paid to the affairs of the Peninsula during the wars with Napoleon. In none of these compositions does the subject seem to have taken forcible possession of the poet's imagination: the materials are resolutely

[1] *Lay of the Laureate*, Proem 8

worked into their context by a conscious effort of scientific analysis, which, being perceived by the reader, destroys faith in the poetical illusion. The author himself is always imposing on the reader his didactic self-consciousness. As with Wordsworth, in the case instanced by Charles Lamb, he stands before his audience, telling them how they ought to be pleased, and that, in reading his epics, they are not to perplex themselves with conventional rules. At the close of his preface to *Madoc* he addresses the reader as follows:

> Come, listen to a tale of times of old!
> Come, for ye know me. I am he who sung
> The Maid of Arc, and I am he who framed
> Of Thalaba the wild and wonderous song.
> Come listen to my lay, and ye shall hear
> How Madoc from the shores of Britain spread
> The adventurous sail, explored the ocean paths,
> And quelled barbarian power, and overthrew
> The bloody altars of idolatry,
> And planted in its fanes triumphantly
> The cross of Christ. Come listen to my lay!

The conscious self-importance of the poet and his confidence in his power to create the belief that a Welsh prince, never before heard of by the reader, had twice crossed the Atlantic, without any one venturing to follow in his track until Columbus discovered America and Cortes conquered Mexico, are not less remarkable than his contempt for the advice of Horace:

> difficile est proprie communia dicere; tuque
> rectius Iliacum carmen deducis in actus,
> quam si proferres ignota indictaque primus.

As *Madoc* is framed on the same principles as D'Avenant's *Gondibert*,[1] its coldness may be similarly accounted for. *Joan of Arc* is not open to the same objection; but the preface to the poem—which, in its censure of all previous epics, resembles the arrogant preface to *Gondibert*—shows a curious failure to understand the expectations of an audience in narrative poetry:

It is the common fault of Epic Poems, that we feel little

[1] See vol. iii. pp. 302-3.

interest for the heroes they celebrate. The national vanity of a Greek or a Roman might have been gratified by the renown of Achilles or Æneas; but to engage the unprejudiced, there must be more of human feelings than is generally to be found in the character of a warrior. From this objection the *Odyssey* alone may be excepted. Ulysses appears as the father and the husband, and the affections are enlisted on his side. The judgment must applaud the well-digested plan and splendid execution of the *Iliad*, but the heart always bears testimony to the merit of the *Odyssey*: it is the poem of nature, and its personages inspire love rather than command admiration. The good herdsman Eumæus is worth a thousand heroes!

At first sight this might be supposed to be the presumption of a youthful critic disputing the maxim of Aristotle that in epic, as in dramatic, poetry the conduct of action is of even more importance than the representation of character.[1] But in truth the keynote to the criticism is found in the sentence about "the good herdsman Eumæus." Far from being intended to engage the interest of "the unprejudiced," *Joan of Arc* is steeped in party spirit. It was written, like *Wat Tyler*, in the days when Southey was a hot advocate of the French Revolution, and a furious opponent of the foreign policy of his native country. The subject is plainly selected with an eye not so much to the invasion of France by Henry V. and his successor, as to the anti-Republican coalition of Monarchs in 1793: no pains are spared in degrading the character of an English monarch whom Shakespeare had made the special national hero; and revolutionary sentiments, quite alien to the historical situation, are put into the mouths of imaginary actors.[2] Nash in the times

[1] See page 434.

[2] Particularly a personage called Conrade, supposed to be a discarded lover of Agnes Sorel, *e.g.*:

"Perish these mighty ones,"
Cried Conrade, "these prime ministers of death,
Who stalk elated o'er their fields of fame,
And count the thousands they have massacred,
And with the bodies of the innocent rear
[illegible]

And

of Elizabeth had spoken of the delight with which thousands of spectators in the theatre had witnessed a representation of the great deeds of the English Talbot;[1] but in *Joan of Arc* Talbot plays but a poor part compared with the ideal French hero, Conrade. In a poem composed in such a deliberately anti-national spirit the poet and the audience do not start on equal terms.

Nor does the poet himself quite justify the claims that he makes to sovereignty over the imagination of his readers. Not only is he seen constantly at work in his analytical laboratory, but he does not fully succeed in recombining his imaginative materials. In his poems the real is not essentially fused with the romantic. As to the romance the situations, remote (as in *Madoc*), or abstract (as in *Thalaba* and *The Curse of Kehama*), leave the imagination cold; while sympathy is scarcely conciliated on behalf of ideal personages with such uncouth names as Tezogogo, Tlalala, and Ocellopan. The strength of Southey's narratives lies in the descriptive passages, which are full of curious and accurate learning: only, however, by constant reference to the Notes does the reader discover how much credit is due to the ingenuity of the poet, in utilising details which would otherwise be lost sight of in the colossal size of the whole composition.

The style of Southey, in these long poems, reflects his method of conception. They show the same determination to be original, the same contempt of the author for the requirements—or, as he called them, the prejudices—of his audience. In the preface to *Joan of Arc* he takes credit to himself for rising superior to the faults of his epic predecessors:

And be they curst! O groves and woodland shades,
How blest indeed were you, if the iron rod
Should one day from Oppression's hand be wrenched
By everlasting Justice! Come that hour
When in the Sun the Angel of the Lord
Shall stand and cry to all the fowls of heaven,
'Gather ye to the supper of your God,
That ye may eat the flesh of mighty men,
Of captains and of kings.'"

[1] Vol. iv. p. 62.

I have avoided what seems useless and wearying in other poems, and my readers will find no description of armour, no muster-rolls, no geographical catalogues, lion, tiger, bull, bear, and boar similes, Phœbuses or Auroras. And where in battle I have particularised the death of an individual, it is, I hope, like the common list of killed and wounded.

Yet, when he is describing a battle, he copies with care the minuteness of Homer in describing wounds, and the ingenuity of Lucan in inventing them, to an extent which most modern readers will consider unnecessary and grotesque: *e.g.*

The bow-string twanged, on its swift way the dart
Whizzed fierce, and struck there where the helmet-clasps
Defend the neck; a weak protection now,
For through the tube which draws the breath of life
Pierced the keen shaft; blood down the unwonted way
Gushed to the lungs.[1]

In the following passage he has added to these descriptive details a Miltonic mannerism, with a view to producing epic elevation:

But Conrade, rolling round his angry eyes,
Beheld the English chieftain as he aimed
Again the bow: with rapid step he strode;
Nor did not Glacidas the Frank perceive,[2]
At him he drew the string. the powerless dart
Fell blunted from his buckler Fierce he came
And lifting high his ponderous battle-axe,
Full on his shoulder drove the furious stroke,
Deep buried in his bosom · prone he fell,
The cold air rushed upon his heaving heart.

In *Thalaba* and *The Curse of Kehama* he quits these classic imitations, and adopts a new mode of narrative versification.

"*I felt*," *he says*, "*that while it gave the poet a* wider range of expression, it satisfied the ear of the reader. It were easy to make a parade of learning, by enumerating the various feet which it admits; it is only needful to observe that no two lines are employed in sequence which can be read into one . . .

[1] Southey's *Poetical Works* (1829), "Joan of Arc," Book viii.

[2] Nor did they not perceive the evil plight
In which they were, or the fierce pains not feel.
Paradise Lost, Book i. 335-6

One advantage the metre assuredly possesses—the dullest reader cannot distort it into discord: he may read it prosaically, but its flow and fall will be still perceptible. Verse is not enough favoured by the English reader: perhaps this is owing to the obtrusiveness, the regular Jews-harp *twing-twang* of what has been foolishly called heroic measure. I do not wish the improvisatore tune; but something that denotes the sense of harmony, something like the accent of feeling, like the tone which every Poet necessarily gives to Poetry."[1]

After all, this comes to no more than that, having selected a subject in which the imagination of the reader has no share, the poet wishes to create an effect of mystery and strangeness, by emancipating himself from the fetters of an established metre. Metre is the law to which the language, common to both the reader and the poet, has been made to conform by the practice of many generations; and in English the varieties of rhythmical movement have been definitely limited, either within stanzas of various kinds, the heroic couplet, or the modulated periods of blank verse. The metre of *Thalaba* shows no creative effort: it is merely the decomposition of iambic blank verse, with the occasional introduction of anapæstic or dactylic rhythms. Four or five lines of heroic blank verse contain the usual five accents, which may be followed, as the poet chooses, either by one or more octosyllabic lines of four accents, or by lines of six syllables and three accents. Then, by a sudden change, a period will follow in which dactylic and iambic rhythms are arbitrarily mixed: *e.g.*

What | woman is | she
So | wrinkled and | old
That | goes to the | wood?
She | leans on her | staff
With a | tottering | step.
She tells | her bead-|string slow, |
Through fin|gers dull | by age. |
The wan|ton boys | bemock | her;
The babe | in arms, | that meets | her,
Turns round | with quick | affright,
And clings | to his nurs|e's neck.[2]

[1] Preface to *Thalaba*.

[2] *Thalaba*, Book ix. 16.

When Southey says that "it were easy to make a parade of learning by enumerating the various feet which it [the metre] admits," he cannot mean that these "feet" are naturally anticipated in the metre by the ear of the reader. He must mean, what is undoubtedly true, that the iambic, dactylic, and anapaestic rhythms are all to be found in the language at large, and may be combined at will in "the *tone* which every Poet necessarily gives to Poetry."

Each reader can judge as to the poetical result of the unbounded license of expression which Southey claims for himself. Probably it will be very generally felt that, in a long narrative poem, the jerking and spasmodic movements of the rhymeless metre put an intolerable strain upon the ear. But in brief descriptive passages beautiful effects may undoubtedly be produced, as in the abrupt opening stanza of *Thalaba*:

How beautiful is night!
A dewy freshness fills the silent air,
No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain,
Breaks the serene of heaven.
In full-orbed glory yonder Moon divine
Rolls through the dark blue depths
Beneath her steady ray
The desert-circle spreads,
Like the round ocean, girdled with the sky.
How beautiful is night!

In *The Curse of Kehama* Southey limits his freedom by rhyme; and though the reader is not allowed to expect the recurrence of the rhymes at regular intervals, the poet shows such an easy and masterly command over the movement of the metre that the ear is satisfied and left with a sense of repose. The metrical periods indeed are not of themselves adapted to carry the imagination through a narrative poem of great length, in which all the situations are inhuman; but they give a setting of much splendour to the descriptive imagery, as in the following lines, where Southey seems to be inspired by recollections of *Kubla Khan*, which Coleridge had doubtless recited to him:

Then to a garden of the Deity
Ereenia led the Maid.
In the mid-garden towered a giant tree;
Rock-rooted on a mountain-top it grew,
Reared its unrivalled head on high,
And stretched a thousand branches o'er the sky,
Drinking with all its leaves celestial dew.
Lo! where from thence, as from a living well,
A thousand torrents flow!
For still in one perpetual shower,
Like diamond drops, ethereal waters fell
From every leaf of all its ample bower.
Rolling adown the steep
From that aerial height,
Through the deep shade of aromatic trees,
Half-seen, the cataracts shoot their gleams of light,
And pour upon the breeze
Their thousand voices; far away the roar
In modulations of delightful sound,
Half-heard, and ever varying, floats around.
Below an ample lake expanded lies,
Blue as the over-arching skies;
Forth issuing from that lovely Lake,
A thousand rivers water Paradise.
Full to the brink, yet never overflowing,
They cool the amorous gales, which, ever blowing,
O'er their melodious surface love to stray;
Then winding back their way,
Their vapours to the parent tree repay;
And ending thus where they began,
And feeding thus the source from whence they came,
The eternal rivers of the Swerga ran,
For ever renovate, yet still the same.
On that ethereal lake, whose waters lie
Blue and transpicuous, like another sky,
The Elements had reared their King's abode.
A strong controlling power their strife suspended,
And there their hostile essences they blended,
To form a palace worthy of the God.
Built on the Lake the waters were its floor;
And here its walls were water arched with fire,
And here were fire with water vaulted o'er;
And spires and pinnacles of fire
Round watery cupolas aspire,
And domes of rainbow rest on fiery towers,
And roofs of flame are turreted around
With cloud, and shafts of cloud with flame are bound.
Here too the elements for ever veer,

Ranging around with endless interchanging;
Pursued in love, and so in love pursuing,
In endless revolutions here they roll;
For ever their mysterious work renewing
The parts all shifting, still unchanged the whole.[1]

As Southey's youthful ambition was to enlarge the bounds of the traditional forms of poetry, rather than to discover new worlds for the imagination to conquer, he made no attempt, like Wordsworth, to revolutionise the principles of poetical diction. His style is free from a straining after conscious simplicity. His copious vocabulary and manly feeling succeed in avoiding every kind of affectation, and his blank verse is nervous, lucid, and dignified. Its only defect is, that the obviously ambitious nature of the poet's aim is not sufficiently justified by that unmistakable individuality of expression which, springing directly out of poetic inspiration, spontaneously lifts style out of the domain of prose. When the illusions of youth vanished, in Southey's later compositions, to which I shall have occasion to refer hereafter, the prosaic atmosphere of officialism pressed heavily on an imagination which, in the days of early partisanship, was always fresh and eager.

To sum up the poetical achievements of the Lake School: their work was one of renovation which contained in itself a certain element of destruction. They conferred a boon of inestimable value on English taste by giving a salutary shock to the national imagination when it had become effete and exhausted. Full of corruption as it was, English society was far from being radically diseased. The old feudal ideals of loyalty, honour, and chivalry, illustrated in the character of Sir Roger de Coverley, though overlaid by Walpole's materialising policy, were still widely reverenced among the country gentlemen. Many of the spiritual tendencies of the ecclesiastical ages preserved an under-current of religious life amid the semi-Erastianism of the Anglican Establishment. Among the aristocracy deeply-rooted feudal

[1] *Curse of Kehama*, viii 9.

institutions kept alive a love of the country with its customs and sports, in striking contrast, as M. Taine observes, with the habits of the French nobility, who, under the *ancien régime*, were never happy away from Versailles.[1] Wordsworth's poetry tended to give new vitality to these suppressed elements in the English imagination. It appealed to primitive instincts and simple affections, and by awakening interest in the secret life of external nature, helped to enlarge the perceptions of a society long morbidly absorbed in the observation of artificial manners. Men began to feel a grandeur in sights and objects which they had been accustomed to view with indifference or aversion:

The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
And in the narrow rent, at every turn,
Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
Black drizzling crags that spoke by the wayside
As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
The unfettered clouds and region of the heavens,
Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light—
Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.[2]

Wordsworth could not justly claim (though he did claim) to have *created* this feeling for Nature: had he merely done this his poetry might have perished with the mood to which he had given birth. Before him Cowper, speaking the feelings of many Englishmen, had said, 'God made the country and man made the town"[3]; while Thomson, describing the spread of light in the early morning, had reproduced in verse effects which the eye

[1] See vol. v. p. 460. [2] *The Simplon Pass.*
[3] *The Task*, Book i.

had been long trained to observe by the art of the landscape painter.[1]

Wordsworth's real praise is to have done for the poetry of Nature what Pope did for the poetry of manners: to have found the highest form of utterance for a widely diffused feeling; "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." Neither the semi-deistic philosophy of Thomson, nor the Calvinistic quietism of Cowper, had such power to awake emotion in the imagination as the passionate enthusiasm thrown by Wordsworth into his lines on Tintern Abbey. And so too, though a path had been prepared for him to appeal to the simpler affections of his readers by the revival of the Ballad form which had been in progress for some time before he began to write, no previous poet had used the form for modern sentiment with such power and pathos as he shows in the ballad of *Lucy Gray*.

Coleridge's reform in English poetry was exerted in a different direction, and was mainly concerned with the technical side of the art. Before his time the rhythms employed by English poets had been almost exclusively iambic or trochaic, and the traditional tendency was to confine them more and more within the heroic couplet, which, from its narrow limits gave little scope for liberty or variety of movement, and, however effective for the purposes of epigram, was an inadequate vehicle for the expression of powerful emotions. Coleridge, advancing along the line of invention opened by Chatterton, converted the ancient rhythms and metres of the language into vehicles for his own imaginative thought. His ear was haunted by the possibilities of metrical tunes suggested to him by his study of ballad poetry; and he associated these with the strange, and—as it seemed to him—supernatural experiences of his own imagination, with genius akin to that of a musician. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* he showed that it was possible, through the Ballad form, to give expression to a marvellous series of supernatural incidents, *Christabel* was an

[1] *The Seasons*, "Summer," 43-94.

illustration of the beautiful and picturesque effects that might be created in the fancy by the combination of dactylic with iambic and trochaic rhythms in the line of four accents.

Southey marched in his poetry along both the tracks explored by the other two members of the Lake School. He was at one with Wordsworth in his admiration for Nature, and in his desire to arouse simple and manly emotions: he followed, or even occasionally preceded, Coleridge in the novelty of his metrical experiments. But as he was much inferior in genius to his friends, he has left behind him no poetry which is, like theirs, of a monumental character.

While the work of the Lake Poets is always full of life, freshness, and individuality, they introduced into the art a certain destructive tendency by their neglect of tradition. Hitherto the course of English poetry had resembled the growth of the English Constitution in the continuity of its development. Our poets had worked upon and enlarged the lines of their predecessors. In the words of Dryden:

> Milton was the poetical son of Spenser, and Mr. Waller of Fairfax, for we have our lineal descents and clans as well as other families. Spenser more than once insinuated that the soul of Chaucer was transfused into his body, and that he was begotten by him two hundred years after his decease. Milton has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original, and many besides myself have heard our famous Waller own that he derived the harmony of his numbers from the *Godfrey of Bulloigne*, which was turned into English by Mr. Fairfax.[1]

This process of gradual evolution now ceased. Brought up in an atmosphere of revolution the Lake School, in their insurrection against the fashionable taste of the age, were determined to strike out for themselves in poetry a completely original path; and in their theory, as well as in much of their work, Wordsworth and Coleridge departed altogether from traditional practice. They placed the source of poetical inspiration exclusively in the mind of the individual poet, without reference to those active

[1] Preface to *Fables*.

fountains of social feeling, thought, and language, from which the reader as well as the poet had been accustomed to derive his imaginative ideas.

Individualism so deliberate often drew their imagination out of the deep stream of national poetry, and stranded them on rocks or in shallows. It led Wordsworth to his perverted conclusion that there was no essential difference between the language of poetry and prose, and that the true models of poetical diction were to be looked for in the language of the peasantry. Contempt for conventional literary forms, joined to a fanatical confidence in the soundness of his own philosophy, produced in his style that frequent prosiness which so often mars in his poetry the effect of a sublime context, and which is subtly characterised by Coleridge himself in one of his letters to Thomas Allsop:

> Poets (especially if philosophers too) are apt to represent the effect made upon themselves as general; the geese of Phœbus are all swans; and Wordsworth's shepherds and estates men are Wordsworths, even (as in old Michael) in the unpoetic traits of character.[1]

In the work of Coleridge intense individuality produced a different effect. Prosiness can never be imputed to his style. His poetry reflects rather the dreaminess, the irresolution, the fragmentary character of his thought. In his case and in that of Wordsworth it may well be that the defects of their qualities were inevitable; that the genius which inspired *The Highland Reaper* necessarily strayed into the long barren wastes of prose in *The Excursion*; that the inconclusiveness of *Christabel* is inseparably connected with the beauty of its imagery and its music; and that, without faults like these, English taste could never have been extricated from the morass of conventionalism into which it had sunk. Admitting this possibility, History is still bound to point out the dangers to which the art has been exposed by the disregard of tradition and experience.

[1] *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge* (1835), vol. i. p. 105.

CHAPTER VIII

ROMANTICISM IN ENGLISH POETRY

THE POETRY OF ROMANTIC SELF-REPRESENTATION: GEORGE GORDON NOEL, LORD BYRON

THOUGH Wordsworth and Coleridge both ended their career by becoming champions of the social system which they began with attacking, the poetical principles they had started took root in their own age and bore fruit in the next. The doctrine of the liberty and supremacy of the individual imagination was congenial to many spirits which had long been prepared for a revolt against the conventions of classical rule; and the Nature-worship inaugurated in the poetry of Wordsworth was soon translated into many forms of artistic self-expression, all tending to collide with ethical or aesthetic conclusions established in the national conscience by long and unbroken tradition. Most powerful of all these revolutionary forces was the poetry of Byron.

George Gordon Noel Byron was born in Holles Street, London, on the 22nd January 1788. In his character, as finally developed, were concentrated many of the historic qualities of an ancient family. The first Lord Byron, in the age of the Civil War, was an ardent Cavalier, whose headlong bravery was the cause of some of the victories and more of the defeats of the Royalist army. The fifth, known as the "wicked" Lord, killed his neighbour and kinsman, Mr. Chaworth, in a duel, and was tried before the House of Lords on a charge of murder. After his acquittal he retired to Newstead Abbey, the family seat, where he

lived in wasteful solitude, cutting down the timber and allowing the house to fall into ruinous decay. As he died without descendants the succession passed into a collateral line. The poet's grandfather, Admiral John Byron, was a bold naval explorer, whose hardships at sea obtained for him the name of "Foul-weather Jack," and some of whose experiences are utilised for the description of the shipwreck in *Don Juan*. His eldest son, John, a man of handsome person and licentious habits, eloped with and, after her divorce from her husband, married, the Marchioness of Carmarthen, having by her a daughter Augusta, married in 1807 to Colonel Leigh. In 1787, his first wife having died, Captain Byron married Catherine Gordon, heiress of Gight, in Aberdeenshire, with a fortune of about £23,000, who became by him the mother of the poet. John Byron soon wasted his wife's money, and was obliged to take up his abode in France, whence Mrs. Byron, being deserted by her husband, returned to London just before her son's birth, after which she lived on the remnant of her fortune in Aberdeen. She was a woman not without understanding, but of an unrestrained temper, who treated her child with an alternation of fondness and violence, thus early implanting in him tendencies which grew into the lawless habits of his later years. He was sent to the Grammar School at Aberdeen, but seems to have learned little during his childhood except from his nurse, Mary Gray, from whom he gained a considerable knowledge of the Bible In 1798, on the death of his grand-uncle, the fifth lord, he succeeded to the title and the family estates, and in 1799 was placed at the school of a Dr. Glennie at Dulwich, where the slight lameness with which he was born was increased by unskilful medical treatment.

From this school he was sent to Harrow in 1801 At first he was not happy there, but he endured the bullying, fought his way up the school, and during the last year and a half before going to Cambridge became devotedly attached to it. The atmosphere of the place did much to develop two of the most

prominent features in his character, his stubborn rebelliousness and his romantic affections. Harrow was essentially a Whig school, mainly filled with the sons of that section of the English aristocracy who brought from their homes an hereditary attachment to the historic tradition of liberty, and with youthful spirit readily developed this into lawlessness. The boys were accustomed to take their own share in the appointment of a Head-master, and in 1771 the choice by the Governors of Dr. Heath, as successor to Sumner, had led to a rebellion which ended in the secession of a considerable part of the school to Stanmore under Samuel Parr, for whom the appointment had been desired. In 1805 another rebellion of the same kind occurred owing to the unpopular appointment of Dr. George Butler instead of Mark Drury in the place of Dr. Joseph Drury. This may have been the occasion on which Byron, who was one of the ring-leaders, declares that he prevented the boys from burning down the Fourth-form Room in the old school, by pointing out to them the names of their ancestors carved on the walls. It was at any rate then that he wrote his satire "Pomposus" of which he afterwards repented.

At Harrow he formed many of those enthusiastic friendships which he records in *Hours of Idleness*, and to some of which he alludes in *Childe Harold*. External evidence that cannot be questioned points to the extraordinary precocity of his passions. His emotions were as transitory as they were powerful, but so long as they lasted they seemed to absorb his whole being. He records in his Journal for 26th November 1813 his love for his cousin Mary Duff, and marvels at the hold it obtained over him at so early an age as eight years. In September 1803 he was seized with a passion for his neighbour Miss Chaworth, so vehement that he refused to return to Harrow after the summer holidays. His mother writing to her solicitor says:

He has no indisposition that I know of but love, desperate love, the worst of all maladies in my opinion. In short the boy

is distractedly in love with Miss Chaworth, and he has not been with me three weeks all the time he has been in this county, but spent all his time at Annesley.[1]

He did not go back to school till after the Christmas holidays.

Powerful as appears to have been this boyish passion, even the remembrance of it was for the moment obliterated by the romance of his school friendships. In "Childish Recollections," a poem published in *Hours of Idleness*, he speaks (at the age of nineteen) of

Hours of my youth! when nurtured in my breast,
To Love a stranger, Friendship made me blest;

and in another contemporary poem, entitled *L'Amitié est l'Amour sans Ailes* (a proverb which seems at this time to have fastened on his fancy), he addresses Harrow in a stanza that at once appeals to the heart of every Harrovian:

Seat of my youth! thy distant spire
  Recalls each scene of joy;
My bosom glows with former fire,
  In mind again a boy.
Thy grove of elms, thy verdant hill,
Thy every path delights me still,
  Each flower a double fragrance flings;
Again, as once, in converse gay,
Each dear associate seems to say
  "Friendship is love without his wings."

His special friends at Harrow, celebrated under the names of Alonzo, Davus, Lycus, Euryalus, and Cleon, were the Hon. John Wingfield, John Tattersall, Lord Clare, Lord Delawarr, and Edward Long; and one poem in the Collection is addressed to the Duke of Dorset who was apparently his "fag."

Joseph Drury, the Head-master, succeeded entirely in gaining his affection and respect, and was able to exercise over him a gentle control. But at home, in the holidays, the injudicious conduct of his mother alienated all feelings of love. Writing to his half-sister, Augusta, on 11th November 1804, he says:

[1] *Byron's Works* (Murray, 1898), *Letters and Journals*, vol. i. p. 16.

I am in great hopes that at Christmas I shall be with Hanson during the vacation. I shall do all I can to avoid a visit to my mother wherever she is. It is the first duty of a parent to impress precepts of obedience on their children, but her method is so violent, so capricious, that the patience of Job, the versatility of a member of the House of Commons could not support it. I revere Dr. Drury much more than I do her, yet he is never violent, never outrageous: I dread offending him, but the respect I bear him makes me unhappy when I am under his displeasure. My mother's precepts never convey instruction, never fix upon my mind; to be sure they are calculated to inculcate obedience, so are chains and tortures, but though they may restrain for a time, the mind revolts from such treatment.[1]

In society, as was natural for a boy conscious of great powers, checked by want of sympathy in those nearest to him, he was shy and awkward, but readily responsive to any one who showed an understanding of his feelings, a characteristic which may be noted in all his correspondence with the Pigots, neighbours of his mother while she was living at Burgage Manor, Southwell. Having matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge, on 1st July 1805, he went up in the following October, and seems to have been pleased with the freedom of college life as compared with the restraint he endured at home from his "domestic tyrant, Mrs. Byron."[2] Without giving any heed to its studies, he joined eagerly in all the amusements afforded by the life of an English University; but (though Newstead was now a source of revenue to his guardians) he was much hampered by money difficulties, which made him desirous of leaving Cambridge at the end of his second year. Eventually he resolved to remain another year for the purpose of taking his degree, but the fruits of his last period of residence were a great accumulation of debt.

He took his M.A. degree on the 4th July 1808, before which date he had made his first public appearance as an author. In November 1806 he published, through S. and J. Ridge of Newark, a collection of poems entitled

[1] *Byron's Works* (Murray), *Letters*, vol. i. pp 47-8.
[2] *Ibid. Letters*, vol. i p. 81.

Fugitive Pieces. This volume he suppressed on advice of his friend Mr. Becher, a clergyman, but reprin it with one or two omissions and several additions January 1807, calling the new series *Poems on Vari Occasions.* In the summer of the same year the coll tion was increased by the addition of twelve new poe making in all thirty-nine, and was published with title *Hours of Idleness ; a series of Poems Original Translated. By George Gordon, Lord Byron, a Mi* The poems were favourably reviewed in many quart and Byron was gratified, not only by the flattery wh his work procured for him from persons in fashiona society, but by the letters of congratulation he recei from men of mark in literature. In January 1808, howe *Hours of Idleness* was criticised by *The Edinburgh Rev* in the tone of contemptuous depreciation which had r become characteristic of that periodical. If Byron l not been previously encouraged by the unsolici praise which he had received from those whom he l every right to consider as good and impartial judg possibly disgust and irritation might have confirmed l in his proclaimed resolution to write no more poe As it was, the shock having been lessened by a warn he had received with regard to the nature of the fo coming article, his mind was prepared for retaliation, his weapons were ready to his hand. He had alre written 380 lines of a satire on the poetry of the pe under the title *British Bards*: it was a simple matter him to supplement this with an attack on the critic *The Edinburgh Review*, and to publish (March 1809) enlarged composition in its famous form of *English Ba and Scotch Reviewers.* The satire was at once success Though it was published anonymously, Byron made attempt to conceal the authorship, and, read in connect with the romantic *Hours of Idleness*, the versati displayed in the composition assured the public of arrival of a new poet of genius. A second edition called for in the following October, and two more editi during Byron's absence from England. These lasted for

years. After his return from his travels he was preparing a fifth edition, when he changed his mind, resolved to suppress the satire, and in 1812 gave instructions to the publisher Cawthorn to burn the whole of the new impression.

Meantime he had put into the hands of Dallas, a literary acquaintance who had shown particular sympathy with his previous productions, two cantos of a poem, written abroad, of which he entertained but a poor opinion. Dallas, after negotiations with several publishers, showed them to John Murray, who readily undertook to publish them. They appeared in March 1812, with the title of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and produced an electrical effect. "I awoke in the morning," says Byron, "to find myself famous." Could any critic have taken a bird's-eye view of the state of contemporary imagination, the success of the poem might have been confidently anticipated. The Della Cruscan craze itself was merely an absurd symptom of the extent to which fashionable society had been penetrated by the spirit of ennui and romantic sensibility. *Hours of Idleness* was a product of the same disease, exhibited in a more genuinely poetical form; and when *Childe Harold* made its appearance, gratifying at once the craving of the mind for a larger liberty, and the desire to see its own weariness and suppressed energy embodied in an imaginative shape, the enthusiasm of the polite world knew no bounds. Byron became the idol of the ruling aristocracy, and for four years the leaders of fashion, male and female, echoed with servility the note of romanticism which he had sounded in his poetry. He himself surveyed the crowd of his worshippers with his usual clear-sighted cynicism. At first he was satisfied with the incense offered to him, and talked, with an author's affectation, of writing no more. He made the most of the favours which were lavished on him by the most beautiful women of the time, lent his assistance languidly to the promotion of the Whig political interest, or indulged his humour by keeping company with prize-fighters and tavern-haunters.

Presently the ambition for poetical fame began again to work, and in June 1813 bore fruit in *The Giaour*, which was followed in November of the same year by *The Bride of Abydos*. Both poems created as much enthusiasm as *Childe Harold*. Scarcely had the latter of them been published, when the poet set to work again and—an astonishing feat—wrote in a fortnight (December 18-31) *The Corsair*, which in popularity eclipsed both of its immediate predecessors. "I sold," says Murray, "on the day of publication—a thing perfectly unprecedented —10,000 copies."[1] *The Corsair* was succeeded by *Lara* published together with Rogers's *Jacqueline*, in August 1814. This too produced a profound sensation. John Murray writes to his wife on 29th August 1814 that he has sold the whole 6000 of the first edition, and hopes to sell 10,000 more. It is a proof of the extraordinary capriciousness of Byron's temper that, in spite of his successes, some unfavourable criticism of his *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte*, published anonymously, in April 1814, so disgusted him that he wrote to Murray, enclosing a draft for the copyright of all his works, which he had determined to suppress, and only consented to revoke his determination at Murray's earnest request, and on the plea that such a proceeding "would be inconvenient to him."[2]

The tide of his popularity was now on the turn. He was bitterly attacked in *The Courier* and other Tory papers after the publication of *The Corsair* for appending to that poem *Stanzas on a Lady Weeping*, which had originally appeared anonymously in *The Morning Chronicle*, after the Prince Regent had refused to displace the Ministry in favour of his former Whig friends. *The Courier* also indulged in sarcastic remarks on the large sums of money he was supposed to have received from Murray, and on the inconsistency of the flattering terms in which he now publicly addressed many of those whom he had so unscrupulously reviled in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. He was overwhelmed with debts, to extricate himself from which the most obvious resource

[1] Smiles, *Memoir of John Murray*, i. 223

[2] *Ibid.* i. 229

seemed to be to sell Newstead. Negotiations for this purpose were far advanced in 1812, when a Mr. Claughton offered himself as a purchaser for £140,000, but, as the latter was unable to complete the purchase, he was allowed to withdraw with a forfeit of £25,000, and the poet still remained involved in financial difficulty. The property was eventually sold to Byron's old school-fellow, Colonel Wildman, for £94,500 after he himself had finally left England.

Another way of relief from his embarrassments was a marriage suitable in respect of fortune. To this he had for some time been advised by others, and was himself inclined. The lady on whom his thoughts fixed themselves was Anna Isabella Milbanke, prospective heiress of her father, Sir Ralph Milbanke, and, on her mother's side, of the second Lord Wentworth. Byron made her acquaintance in 1812, and was attracted by the simplicity and sincerity of her manners, contrasting favourably, as they did, with those of the fashionable society by which he was at once flattered and bored. In the autumn of that year he proposed to her, but was rejected. Miss Milbanke, however, must have repented of her first resolution. She resumed a correspondence with him in the following year, and though her letters to him have not been published, his to her are of the greatest interest, as suggesting an incompatibility of temperament which made inevitable the subsequent separation. Byron evidently admired his correspondent's intellect. In writing to her he lays aside completely the tone of reckless cynicism which he persistently maintains with men—even those so intimate with him as Moore—and addresses her in language at once serious and respectful. He admits unreservedly his own moral defects: at the same time he holds out no hope "that these are ever likely to be cured by a growing sense of religion." On the other hand, as far as can be gathered from Byron's letters, Miss Milbanke, an exalted idealist, of the strictest moral and religious principles, flattered by the deference paid to her opinions by a man of powerful genius, trusted too confidently to the influence

she might exercise over him as a wife. Her interest in him rapidly ripened into attachment. They were engaged in September 1814, and on the 2nd of January of the following year were married in Seaham House "by special license, with consent of parents."

Marriage speedily brought disillusion. On Byron's side no one can examine the letters which he wrote to Moore between the date of his marriage and the final separation without reading between their lines, when taken in connection with the rest of the evidence, his dissatisfaction with the state of life to which he had voluntarily bound himself. The letters of others speak to the disturbance of his mind within a short period of his marriage.[1] A secret remorse preying upon his conscience, joined to perpetual money difficulties, and a weariness of domestic calm, produced in him a morbid irritability of feeling which may well have found vent in utterances suggestive of madness. From Lady Byron's public statements and private letters on the subject it is clear that, for a long time, she considered her husband insane, and connected his disease with a sentiment of revenge against herself, possibly arising out of his proud resentment at her first rejection of his suit. Writing to Mrs. Leigh on 19th January 1816 she says:

Such is peculiarly the character of Revenge—a passion you know he is capable of feeling, and which has so long formed the *principle of conduct* towards me, as all my retrospections prove, that a change is impossible unless the whole mind were renovated or restored. And it is unhappy that my presence must, in case of more confirmed disease, tend to awaken the morbid ideas by

[1] Mrs. Leigh writing to her brother's friend Hodgson, on 18th March 1815, says of Lady Byron: "I think I never saw or heard or read of a more perfect being in mortal mould than she appears to be"; and in a subsequent letter to the same correspondent she writes "I am sorry to say his nerves and spirits are very far from what I wish them, but don't speak of this to him on any account. I think the uncomfortable state of his affairs is the cause; at least I can discern no other. He has every outward blessing this world can bestow. I trust that the Almighty will be graciously pleased to grant him those inward feelings of peace and calm which are now unfortunately wanting"—*Works of Lord Byron* (John Murray), *Journal and Letters*, vol. iii. p. 189.

association. In short there *cannot* be any hope for me. *I* never can do good.

I think he was so much pleased with my 2nd letter from one expression which acknowledged the power he still has over my affections; and the *love of power* is one principal feature of his Disease or Character. My own conviction of the existence of the former, in any greater degree than many years ago, decreases; but I enclose a few lines for his inspection, if you think that conformable with medical directions: it may be of service that he should read anything from me.[1]

Again, writing to Hodgson, after she had resolved on separating from her husband, she says:

I married Lord B. determined to endure everything whilst there was *any* chance of my contributing to his welfare. I remained with him under trials of the severest nature. In leaving him, which, however, I can scarcely call a *voluntary* measure, I probably saved him from the bitterest remorse. I may give you a general idea of what I have experienced, by saying that he married me with the deepest determination of revenge, avowed on the day of my marriage, and executed ever since with systematic and increasing cruelty, which no affection could change. My security depended on the total abandonment of every moral and religious principle against which (though I trust they were never obtruded) his hatred and endeavours were uniformly directed. The circumstances, which are of too convincing a nature, shall not be generally known while Lord B. allows me to spare him. It is not unkindness that can always change affection.[2]

Lady Byron, doubtless, took an exaggerated view of a temper which she was constitutionally unable to understand, and interpreted chance expressions of her husband in a literal and prosaic sense. But the above passages throw light on the steadfastness of her determination to separate from him when she became convinced that those symptoms of his conduct towards her, which she had at

[1] *Works of Lord Byron* (Murray), *Journal and Letters*, vol. iii. p. 297.

[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 313. It is plain, from the wording of this letter, that Lady Byron is alluding to circumstances of the same kind as those of which she informed her mother after parting from her husband. "A day or two after her arrival at Kirkby her *mother*, Lady Noel, drew from her many circumstances of her misery, and *Lady Byron's own conviction that her life would be endangered by returning to his roof*" (*Astarte*, p. 136).

first imputed to madness, were really the indications of character. On the 10th December 1815 was born their daughter, Augusta Ada Byron. In January 1816 Lady Byron left London for Kirkby Mallory, the residence of her parents, still entertaining the belief that her husband was suffering from a temporary attack of madness. Soon after her arrival she became convinced from the reports of the doctors that he was not mad, and Sir Ralph Noel (for he had recently taken that name) wrote to Byron at her request proposing an amicable separation, which was finally agreed to on 21st April 1816.

Such is Lady Byron's own statement on the subject, the accuracy of which there is not the slightest reason to doubt. What the exact circumstances were that caused her to form her unalterable resolution she herself never disclosed to the public. But her correspondence with Mrs. Leigh, during the whole of the period while the possibility of Byron's madness was under her consideration, proves, beyond question, that her motive was not that alleged by the late Mrs. Beecher Stowe. Whatever she may have told that lady in later years, after certain communications had passed between herself and her sister-in-law, it is certain that, when the separation was arranged, she had at the most no more than the ground of rumour for a suspicion of the facts that Mrs. Stowe asserts were the cause of her action.[1] All that she herself chose to say upon the subject is contained in her own statement; and that is the sole evidence with which the historian is required to deal.

Byron did not practise the same reserve. He was determined that his intimate friends should not remain under the impression that his wife's reticence was likely to create, and with this object he wrote the verses entitled "Fare thee well" and "A Sketch," showed them to Murray, and directed him to put them into type for private distribution. Though he did not intend them for publication,

[1] "The causes of this suspicion did not amount to proof, and Lady Byron did not consider herself justified in acting upon these suspicions by immediately quitting Lord B.'s house" (Statement A. L., dated March 14, 1816).

the poems, as usually happens under such circumstances, found their way to the newspapers, and provided society with a subject for discussion which ought to have been buried in the profoundest privacy. The domestic scandal at once associated itself with party feeling. Byron had given expression to his political sentiments in the lines beginning respectively, "We do not curse thee, Waterloo," inserted in *The Morning Chronicle*, 15th March 1816, and "Star of the brave!" printed in *The Examiner*, 7th April 1816; when therefore the more personal poems appeared in public (14th April) the disgust which they excited gave an opportunity to the editor of *The Champion*, a Tory paper, to point out that want of patriotism was a natural accompaniment of corruption of morals. Similar opinions were expressed in *The Times* and *The Morning Post*; on the other hand, the defence of Byron was undertaken by Opposition journals such as *The Examiner*, *The Independent Whig*, and *The Sunday News*. With the controversy over his private affairs made thus public, while the reasons for the separation remained necessarily mysterious, Byron, alienated from those nearest to him, and overwhelmed by debt, perceived that it was impossible for him to remain in England, and on the 25th April 1816 departed for ever from his native country.

The remaining story of his life may be more briefly told. In May he made the acquaintance of Shelley and his wife at Secheron, a suburb of Geneva, and spent some time with them on the shores of the lake, where (at Ouchy, near Lausanne) he wrote *The Prisoner of Chillon*, and finished the third canto of *Childe Harold*, while at Diodati he wrote *The Dream*. In October he went with his friend Hobhouse into Italy by way of the Simplon, and after a brief stay at Milan and Verona passed on from the latter place to Venice. Here for nearly three years he fixed his headquarters, making excursions from it, as the impulse seized him, to other Italian cities, Ferrara, Florence, and Rome. The lax habits of Venetian society suited the recklessness of his mood since his quarrel with England.

"I was always very partial to Venice," he writes to one correspondent, "and it has not hitherto disappointed me; but I am not sure that the English in general would like it. I am sure that I should *not*, if *they* did; but by the benevolence of God they prefer Florence and Naples, and do not infest us greatly here. In other respects it is very agreeable for Gentlemen of desultory habits—women—wine—and wassail being all extremely fair and reasonable—theatres, etc., good—and Society (after a time) as pleasant as anywhere else (at least to my mind), if you will live with them in their own way—which is different of course from the Ultramontane in some degree. . . . Young and old—pretty and ugly—high and low—are employed in the laudable practice of Love-making—and though most Beauty is found amongst the middling and lower classes—this of course only renders their amatory habits more universally diffused."[1]

These principles he translated into practice by two more or less serious intrigues—one with Marianna Segati, the wife of a draper in the Frezzina, the other with a woman of a still lower position, Margarita Cogni, who could neither read nor write, but who amused him "with her *naïveté* and Pantaloon humour." Shelley, who saw a good deal of him in Venice in the autumn and winter of 1818, comments on his life there in a letter to Peacock

The fact is that first, the Italian women with whom he associates are perhaps the most contemptible of all who exist under the moon—the most ignorant, the most disgusting, the most bigoted. Well, L. B. is familiar with the lowest of these women, the people his gondolieri pick up in the streets. He associates with wretches who seem almost to have lost the gait and physiognomy of man, and who do not scruple to avow practices, which are not only not named, but I believe even seldom conceived in England. He says he disapproves, but he endures. He is heartily and deeply discontented with himself, and contemplating in the distorted mirror of his own thoughts the nature and the habits of man, what can he behold but objects of contempt and despair? But that he is a great poet I think the address to Ocean proves. And he has a certain degree of candour while you talk to him, but unfortunately it does not outlast your departure. No, I do not doubt, and for his own sake I ought to hope, that his present career must end soon in some violent circumstance.[2]

[1] *Byron's Works (Letters)*, vol. iv, p. 235.
[2] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii, p. 235.

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Drury Lane Theatre, and acted on 25th April 1821—necessarily without success. Byron had done all that was possible to prevent its representation, and was indignant at the disregard of his wishes. The failure of the tragedy on the stage did not prevent him from continuing to write in the dramatic form. *Marino Faliero* was followed by *Sardanapalus*, begun in January 1821, and published together with *The Two Foscari* and *Cain, a Mystery*, in December of the same year. *Werner*, begun in 1815, was completed on the 20th of January 1822, and was published by Murray in the following December. Medwin says that it "was written in twenty-eight days, and one entire act at a sitting. The MS. had scarcely an alteration in it for pages together."[1] The dramatic cycle was concluded with *Heaven and Earth*, a "Mystery" published in *The Liberal* in 1822.

His new mood made no difference in his quarrel with English society, and with many of his most eminent poetical contemporaries. He continued from 1818 to produce canto after canto of *Don Juan*, expressing in them his contempt for established opinion in England, and concentrating his satire more particularly on the person of the Poet Laureate. Byron's attitude towards Southey varied considerably. The latter had been one of the chief victims of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*; but he had met his satirist at Holland House in September 1813 with what he calls "becoming courtesy on both sides," and in 1815 Byron's praise of *Roderick* had come to Southey's ears. In 1818, however, as Mr. Prothero justly says, Byron had come to regard Southey "as the personification of successful cant,"[2] and believed that he had grounds of private resentment against him. "I understand," he then wrote to Murray, "the scoundrel said on his return from Switzerland two years ago that 'Shelley and I were in a league of Incest.'" From this date onward Southey appears in Byron's letters and poems as the representation of all that

[1] Medwin, *Conversations*, p 412

[2] *Byron's Letters* (Murray), vol. vi. p 379.

was most hateful to the writer in English politics and English taste. He addressed to the Laureate a dedication of *Don Juan*, and made a bitter attack on him in a *Reply* to Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine* for August 1819, in which *Don Juan* had been severely criticised. Neither the dedication nor the *Reply*, however, was published during Byron's lifetime, and, except for incidental allusions in *Don Juan*, Southey remained unmolested by Byron till he himself attacked the latter, in the preface to his *Vision of Judgment* (published on 11th April 1821), as the leader of the "Satanic school" of poetry.

This assault was delivered professedly on public grounds, both religious and political. Southey traced the system on which he supposed Byron and his allies to write, to the doctrines of the French Revolution. But his theory laid him open to an instant and deadly retort. Whether or no his accusation was well founded—and, in an Appendix to *The Two Foscari*, published on 11th December 1821, Byron denied its justice—it was not one that could consistently be preferred by the author of *Wat Tyler* and the scheme of Pantisocracy. No doubt the latter had repudiated his old opinions; but he was thereby exposed to the always odious charge of being a renegade; at the same time the absurd metrical form in which his new creed was put forward in his *Vision of Judgment* offered a fair mark to a poet of Byron's inventive wit.

The counter-attack on Southey and the governing society of England was published in the first number of *The Liberal*, published 15th October 1822. This was a paper of Revolutionary opinions, printed in London by John Hunt, but furnished mainly with contributions from Pisa by Byron, Shelley, and Leigh Hunt, brother of the publisher and the prime originator of the magazine Byron had, in the first instance, sent his own *Vision of Judgment* to John Murray, but as that publisher hesitated to make himself responsible for it, he gave the copyright to John Hunt, and at the same time broke off all com-

mercial relations with Murray; his latest productions, *The Age of Bronze* and *The Island*, being published by Hunt in 1823. The association of Byron with the Hunts was unfortunate Both of the latter were pushing adventurers, and though Leigh Hunt was a man of talent, his impecuniosity and conceit, joined to an imperfect sense of obligation to those who assisted him, almost necessarily degraded, in the eyes of the public, any one who seemed to be co-operating with him on terms of equality. *The Liberal* lived through only four numbers. The death of Shelley, and Byron's sense of being in a false position, caused the conduct of the periodical to be left in the hands of Leigh Hunt, who, thrown upon his own resources, was unable to sustain it at the high level required by the extreme principles it sought to propagate. Byron's treatment of the Hunts, whatever the latter alleged against him, was liberal, even generous. He helped Leigh Hunt to settle at Pisa, and during 1822 assisted him with money to the extent of nearly £600. When the latter applied to him on behalf of his brother, he gave John *The Vision of Judgment*, and afterwards allowed him to publish *The Age of Bronze*, together with cantos vi.-xiv. of *Don Juan*, retaining the copyrights, but asking for no share in the profits He also paid the expenses of John Hunt when prosecuted for the publication of *The Vision of Judgment*.

Byron's critical opinions, which are no less characteristic than his politics, were definitely set forth in his two letters to an unnamed correspondent (John Murray) on Bowles' essay on "Invariable Principles" in poetry (1820); and indeed, in the last four years of his life, his letters breathe an air of resolute conviction which contrasts favourably with the cynical bravado of his sentiments during the earlier part of his residence at Venice. Political ardour at last withdrew him altogether from the field of literature. In May 1823 he was elected a member of the Greek Committee, and entered upon a career of active enterprise in behalf of the independence of Greece. A momentary indecision, caused by his consideration for the

Countess Guiccioli's position, having been overcome, in July 1823 he sailed from Genoa to join the insurgents, and landing in the island of Cephalonia in August, passed thence in December, after a stay of about five months, to Mesolonghi, which was then under blockade by the Turks. His relations with the Greeks are characterised by the clearness of vision and the absence of idealism which show themselves in his letters. He aided them largely with money, and did his best to reconcile their divisions and to organise their untrained forces. This was unfortunately a task beyond his power. The Greeks were split into two factions, one of which was headed by Prince Mavrocordato, the other, smaller but more active, by Koloktronos. As the former was the leader officially recognised by the Greeks, he received Byron's support, but in action he showed only incapacity; so that Byron's part was necessarily confined to the passive defence of Mesolonghi. He maintained at his own expense 500 Suliotes, who for eight months had received no pay, on condition that the Greek provisional Government should provide for 100 more: the whole force was placed under his command. The Greeks and the Suliotes hated each other, and Byron found the greatest difficulty in getting them to act together. In the midst of a desperate struggle to establish order among his motley troops, he was seized in February 1824 with some kind of fit, from which he partially recovered; but his constitution was weakened by it, and on 9th April, after a wetting, he complained of rheumatic pains and feverishness. On the 15th he was obliged to keep his bed, from which he never rose. On the 18th April 1824 he lost consciousness, and on the following day he died. His body, transported to England, was buried at Hucknall Torkard.

The poetical genius of Byron is distinguished by two prominent characteristics: an intense self-consciousness, joined to a power, probably unequalled, of absorbing the social atmosphere about him and giving imaginative expression to it. Hence the spirit of his poetry is necessarily always lyrical; at the same time the form of

and fury against the inadequacy of his state to his conceptions, and which discharges rather against Life, and the Author of Life, than the mere living."[1]

Any impartial reader can see that this is sophistry, and that Byron, while professing to write dramatically, is really using the persons of Lucifer and Cain to express his own sentiments. It does not follow that he was not sincere in his apology: self-deception may have blinded him to the purely lyrical character of his compositions.

The truth is that, in everything he wrote, Byron shows himself the child of his age. With all his intense individuality, with a style essentially and idiomatically English, his poems have that universal air which makes them, like *The Sorrows of Werther* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, representative of the active revolutionary spirit in Europe. For the critic and the historian the interest mainly lies in determining how much of this total effect is contributed by the poet's personal genius, and how much by social forces acting on him from without. As I have already said, the twofold influence is strongly marked in his earliest production, *Hours of Idleness*. Here we see the Della Cruscan spirit expressed in the very self-consciousness of the title, and in the announcement of the authorship—"By George, Lord Byron, a Minor." This noble "minor" has already fathomed all the mysteries of life, and perceives its hollowness. He looks back on his schooldays as if he had arrived at the age of threescore years and ten. He paints in his "Childish Recollections" sentimental portraits of his chief friends at school. His ruined Abbey forms the subject of a mournful elegy, in which lamentations over the decay of the edifice mingle themselves naturally with reflections on the decline of his family and on his own position. Visions of ideal love are called up by memories of his Highland home, and of female acquaintances formed when he cannot have been more than ten years old. Other poems give prophetic indications of the satiric vein of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*,

[1] *Letters and Journal*, vol. v. p. 470.

and even of the cynicism of *Don Juan*: in all of these the foundation is laid in the intensely introspective mood which, at a later date, characterises the style of the third canto of *Childe Harold* and *Manfred*; and the sentiment expresses that eager ambition and thirst for praise, neutralised by contempt for self and society, which is confided to his later Journals and most intimate correspondence. Crude and boyish as is the diction of the following stanzas, the sincerity of feeling in them, as illustrated by the actual experiences of the writer, gives them a peculiar interest:

> Dear Becher, you tell me to mix with mankind;
> I cannot deny such a precept is wise;
> But retirement accords with the tone of my mind:
> I will not descend to a world I despise.
>
> . . . .
>
> The fire, in the cavern of Etna concealed,
> Still mantles unseen in its secret recess;
> At length, in a volume terrific, revealed,
> No torrent can quench it, no bounds can repress.
>
> Oh! thus the desire, in my bosom, for fame,
> Bids me live, but to hope for Posterity's praise.
> Could I soar with the Phœnix on pinions of flame,
> With him I would wish to expire in the blaze.

Throughout the volume sympathy with romantic modern sentiment is closely associated with a sense of the writer's noble birth; moreover, a genuine admiration for the classical style of the eighteenth century qualifies his aspirations for unrestrained liberty of thought and emotion. This aesthetic admiration had taken form in the satire on his poetical contemporaries, entitled *British Bards*, which he intended to publish in 1807; and in his verses *To the Earl of Clare* may be noted the early growth of his capacity for applying critical canons to his own productions. Speaking in them of *The Edinburgh Review's* critique on Moore's poems he says:

> And yet, while Beauty's praise is thine,
> Harmonious favourite of the Nine!
> Repine not at thy lot.

Thy soothing lays may still be read,
When Persecution's arm is dead,
And critics are forgot.

Still I must yield those worthies merit,
Who chasten, with unsparing spirit,
Bad rhymes, and those who write them:
And though myself may be the next
By critic sarcasm to be vext,
I really will not fight them.

Perhaps they would do quite as well
To break the rudely sounding shell
Of such a young beginner:
He, who offends at pert nineteen,
Ere thirty may become, I ween,
A very harden'd sinner.

Vanity operated on him as it did on Pope; and just as the exquisite polish of the autobiographical *Epistle to Arbuthnot* was evolved out of a number of isolated satiric fragments, occasioned by attacks on Pope's person and poetry, so the desire for retaliation on *The Edinburgh Review* prompted Byron to reanimate the literary satire of *British Bards* with the life and fire which developed that work into *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. It is noticeable, however, that the element of personality which runs through the later work, and was doubtless, to some extent, the cause of its success, is also present in *British Bards*; so that, though the fierceness of the lines on Jeffrey is in part to be attributed to soreness caused by the criticism of *The Edinburgh Review*, the character of the poem as a whole is determined by the class of motive that inspired *The Baviad* and *The Maeviad*. Many minor poets of the day were writing in this vein: the best of such productions are *The Simpliciad*—a satire against the style of conscious simplicity in verse introduced by Wordsworth—and *Epics of the Ton* by Lady Anne Hamilton; to both of which Byron was indebted. The animation of his own lines against Bowles, many of which are embodied in *British Bards*, is prompted by a sincere enthusiasm for Pope, as the greatest representative of the English classical school.

Hints from Horace, an imitation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*—somewhat resembling Pope's *Epistle to Augustus*—the original draft of which was written during Byron's absence from England, is a continuation of the same strain of abstract critical preference. So strongly was Byron imbued with the taste for the classical style, that in his later years he ranked this comparatively cold composition above *Childe Harold* and the romantic poems that immediately followed it. Nevertheless, during his travels he reverted, unconsciously perhaps, to the romantic vein inspiring *Hours of Idleness*, for which he now found a new vehicle of expression in the Spenser stanza. At intervals, through the eighteenth century, this metre had been used by poets whose genius was contemplative rather than active; and popular models of the style existed in Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*, Shenstone's *Schoolmistress*, Beattie's *Minstrel*, to which had recently been added Campbell's *Gertrude of Wyoming*, and Scott's *Vision of Don Roderick*. Except *The Minstrel*, the dominating motive of all of these compositions was "classical"; that is to say, the poet's imagination dwelt rather on the nature of the external object described than on the feelings which the object excited in his breast. Beattie, however, had plainly painted his own portrait in the figure of his Minstrel; and Byron, exaggerating the precedent, introduced into *Childe Harold*, under the mask of a quasi-feudal pilgrim, the feelings of imaginative *ennui*, lyrically expressed in *Hours of Idleness*. He took the precaution of declaring, in a preface, that the motive of the poem was quite impersonal:

"A fictitious character," he says, "is introduced for the sake of giving some connection to the piece; which, however, makes no pretension to regularity. It has been suggested to me by friends, on whose opinions I set a high value, that in this fictitious character, 'Childe Harold,' I may incur the suspicion of having intended some real personage: this I beg leave, once for all, to disclaim—Harold is the child of imagination, for the purpose I have stated."

And in an "addition" which he made to his preface

after the poem had been widely reviewed, he proceeded, in the manner which afterwards became habitual with him, to emphasise his disavowal of self-portraiture, by impugning the justice of the frequent criticism that the character of the hero was not dramatically correct. He maintained, on the contrary, that the figure of his pilgrim was conceived with a moral intention:

> I now leave "Childe Harold" to live his day such as he is; it had been more agreeable, and certainly more easy, to have drawn an amiable character. It had been easy to varnish over his faults, to make him do more and express less, but he never was intended as an example, further than to show, that early perversion of mind and morals leads to satiety of past pleasures and disappointment in new ones, and that even the beauties of nature, and the stimulus of travel (except ambition the most powerful of all excitements) are lost on a soul so constituted, or rather misdirected.

He did not choose to remember that this was exactly the portrait of himself which he had published in *Hours of Idleness*:

> Weary of love, of life, devoured with spleen,
> I rest a perfect Timon, not nineteen.[1]

Had Childe Harold been merely the self-painted portrait of a dissipated young nobleman, the poem in which he is the prominent figure would never have profoundly interested the world. It became famous because it was *representative*; because Byron, without any conscious artistic aim, had taken the right poetic way to give expression to the feeling of *ennui* which, since Horace Walpole confessed to it, had been spreading far and wide through cultivated society.[2] From this point of view the character of the Childe may be considered to have an objective reality which renders it dramatic. Byron, laying the ground-work of his poem in descriptions of foreign travel, opened a new world in which the imagination, weary of order at home, could expatiate with freedom; and when, stimulated partly by the desire for literary fame,

[1] "Childish Recollections."
[2] Compare Walpole's letter on the subject cited in vol. v. p. 361.

partly by an impulse to give utterance to his own restless passions, he again entered upon the path of poetic creation, he instinctively chose a similar vehicle for representing the emotions of the unquiet society about him.

In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* the poet confined himself to reflection: *The Giaour*, on the other hand, was a narrative of action, fragmentary and disconnected, no doubt, but still intelligible as far as concerned the feelings it professed to describe—love, revenge, remorse. Of this poem and of its immediate successors, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, and *Lara*, we may say confidently that the inspiring motive was the restless desire for self-expression, and that the external form which all of them assumed was the result of a constant and morbid introspection. At the same time the apparently dramatic character under which this introspection was veiled fell in most felicitously with the tendency of the public taste. *The Giaour*, *The Corsair*, and *The Bride of Abydos* are professedly stories of that Eastern life in which, since Sir William Jones began to familiarise society with Oriental imagery, English fancy loved to lose itself.

"Stick to the East," writes Byron to Moore—"the oracle, Stael, told me it was the only poetical policy. The North, South, and West, have all been exhausted, but from the East we have nothing but Southey's unsaleables,—and these he has contrived to spoil, by adopting only their most outrageous fictions." [1]

A tale of Turkish love, death, and revenge, shrouded in an atmosphere of mystery, but, in its powerful expression of emotion, hinting at the reality of the incidents related, and raising the suspicion that the poet was the chief actor in his own romance, was precisely the form of poetry for which the public imagination craved. Byron fell into this vein naturally and instinctively. It is evident that, in all the poems mentioned, he traded on some abiding passion, over which he morbidly brooded, and for which he sought relief by projecting it into a quasi-dramatic shape. Thus he writes to Gifford of *The Bride of Abydos*:

[1] *Byron's Works, Letters and Journals*, ii. 255.

You have been good enough to look at a thing of mine in MS.—a Turkish story, and I should feel gratified if you would do it the same favour in its probationary state of printing. It was written, I cannot say for amusement, nor "obliged by hunger and request of friends," but in a state of mind from circumstances which occasionally occur to "us youth," that rendered it necessary for me to apply my mind to something, any thing but reality; and under this not very brilliant inspiration it was composed.[1]

In *The Giaour* the introspective feeling at the root of the poem is thrown into the external form of confession: in *The Corsair* and *Lara* it embodies itself in the description of the leading character: in *The Siege of Corinth* and *Parisina*, the last poems written before Byron's separation from his wife, the dominant motive of self-expression appears, in the one case, in the feelings ascribed to Alp, and, in the other, in the morbid selection of a subject, which anticipates the crime treated of in *Manfred*. Up to the time of his leaving England Byron was content to throw over his own personality the veil of mysterious romance; and though, after the public scandal of the separation, he did not hesitate to rend the veil asunder in the verses entitled "Fare thee well," "Stanzas to Augusta," the opening stanzas of the third canto of *Childe Harold*, and to a certain extent in *The Dream*, he still continued in *Manfred* to emphasise in appearance the *impersonal* side of his invention.

"I forgot to mention to you," he writes to Murray on 15th February 1817, "that a kind of Poem in dialogue (in blank verse) or drama from which 'The Incantation' is an extract, begun last summer in Switzerland, is finished; it is in three acts; but of a very wild, metaphysical, and inexplicable kind. . . . You may perceive . . . that I have no great opinion of this *piece of phantasy*."

Byron's personality is stamped on every line of this poem. As Mr. Coleridge justly writes of it: "The *motif* of *Manfred* is remorse—eternal suffering for inexpiable crime";[2] and all the evidence points to the conclusion

[1] Letter to William Gifford, November 13, 1813. He says practically the same thing to Moore in his letter of November 30, 1813.
[2] *Byron's Works* (*Poetry*), vol. iv. p. 82.

that Manfred's mood was a reflection of Byron's morbid brooding over some unrevealed act, with which his conscience and imagination continued perpetually to torture him. It would be equally useless and mischievous to inquire minutely into the nature of this crime, but historic truth requires attention to be drawn to the poet's intention with regard to the first plan of *The Bride of Abydos*, his declaration to Gifford of the mood in which that poem was written, the selection of the subject of *Parisina*, and the whole drift of *Manfred*, in connection with what he himself says of the inspiration of the poem,[1] and a long-unpublished (but now printed[2]) letter to Mrs. Leigh, written on May the 17th, 1819, at the time when the conception of *Manfred* was in his mind. No student of this powerful and seemingly dramatic representation of "remorse" can doubt that it is—like the "confession" in *The Giaour*, and the sympathetic character-painting of *The Corsair* and *Lara*—the imaginative product of self-expression and personal experience. As to the dramatic form of the poem, there seems to be little doubt that the figure of the hero was suggested to Byron after "Monk" Lewis had translated to him Goethe's *Faust*; but the character of the drama is so largely of the nature of soliloquy, and is so completely coloured with the scenery of "the Staubach and the Jungfrau," that the whole effect remains entirely original. It is observable in *Manfred*, as in *Lara*, that for the incidents of action, such as they are, Byron is generally indebted to the inventions of others, which he adapts to the character and situation of his own hero. In *Lara* he borrowed from Mrs. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* the "mystery" surrounding the character of Montoni, as well as the description of the duel between the latter and the Count: the "peasant's tale" of the murder of Sir Ezzelin is grounded on a passage in Roscoe's *Life and Pontificate of*

1 "It was the *Staubach* and the *Jungfrau* and *something else*, much more than *Faustus*, that made me write *Manfred*" (Letter to Murray of June 7, 1820)

2 *Astarte*, the title of the volume in which this letter appears, by the late Lord Lovelace, is now withdrawn from circulation.

Leo the Tenth, describing the assassination and burial of the Duke of Gandia. In *Manfred* many of the supernatural incidents are taken directly from Goethe's *Faust*, Beckford's *Vathek*, Plutarch's Life of Pausanias, and Ennapius's Life of the philosopher Iamblichus. A literary practice of this kind made it easy for Byron to offer a plausible defence when his critics accused him of self-representation.

When we look away from this habit of romantic self-expression to its effect in detail upon Byron's art, the most observable feature in his narrative work is its comparative formlessness. In *The Giaour*, for example, the first of his essentially narrative poems, it is difficult to discover, from the fragmentary way in which the story is told, whether the different speakers are respectively the Giaour, the Turkish fisherman, or the poet himself. In *The Corsair* and *Lara* there is nothing in the structure of the tales to explain the part played by the principal actors, on the painting of whose characters an amount of labour is expended out of all proportion to the incidents related; and in a lesser degree the same observation applies to *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Siege of Corinth*. Reflection and description predominate enormously over action in *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*, though both are professedly stories of something done. All that Childe Harold does is to move from one place to another, and to meditate upon the scenes before him for the moment; in *Don Juan* the no longer veiled personality of the poet causes him for ever to pause in his narrative for the purpose of satiric soliloquy. Of all these tendencies in his poetry Byron was fully aware, nor was it so much reckless bravado, as a sincere critical perception of the value of classical form, that made him speak disparagingly of the works of himself and his contemporaries in comparison with the poetry of Pope.

Of the form of his dramas little need be said. These were never intended for representation on the stage. The lyrical motive of self-expression can easily be discerned in them all; but as to the observance of the "unities," on which Byron piques himself, in *Marino*

Faliero, for example, we may infer that it was in reality by no means a cold artistic preference for the classical over the romantic form that made him take his stand on the "orthodox" principle, but a perception that the French dramatic system was better suited for his own purpose than the English. In the English poetic drama plot and action, with an attendant development of character, are the essential features; in *Marino Faliero* these are conspicuous by their absence. There everything depends upon motive and intention. Through all the five acts nothing of what is meditated is accomplished; the characters, except that of the Doge, are insignificant. The Dogaressa is introduced merely for the sake of rhetorical antithesis; the part of Israel Bertuccio, after Faliero the most prominent conspirator, is entirely conventional; the patrician Lioni is merely a reflection of one of Byron's transient moods. The strength of the drama, therefore, lies necessarily in the speeches expressive of motive; and in this respect it resembles the plays of Corneille and Racine rather than those of Shakespeare. The unity of place, though it in no way promotes simplicity of action, affords a certain critical excuse for the length of the soliloquies and the dialogue. Where the business of the *dramatis personae* is not to act but to talk about the situation, it is unnecessary for them to shift any of the various scenes more than a few hundred yards from the Doge's palace.

Looking to the character of Byron's diction and metre, it is interesting to observe with what closeness these adapted themselves to the constant changes of his emotional mood. The groundwork of his diction is always the colloquial English of the day, as spoken in the highest classes. In a passage which I have already cited in a different context,[1] he criticises the absence of life and movement in the poetry of most of his contemporaries, and ascribes it to their exclusion from all participation in the action, passions, and sentiments of the ruling society. And he continues:

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[1] See ante, pp. 122-3.

Moore and I, the one by circumstances, and the other by birth, happened to be free of the corporation, and to have entered into its pulses and passions, *quarum partes fuimus.* Both of us have learnt by this much which nothing else could have taught us.[1]

His view of "high life," however, shifted perpetually according to the treatment he received from society. Extreme self-consciousness inclined him to dislike company, and to develop in his verse the contemplative, disdainful mood of the Solitary: on the other hand, literary success, and the boundless adulation that followed it, turned his imagination into the sphere of romantic action. Driven from this social position into exile by domestic scandals, his genius once more prompted him to contemplate society from without, and to represent his own quarrel with it, either directly in a cynical and satiric, or indirectly in a dramatic form. The following examples of poetical expression, taken from his work produced under the influence of these different moods, will illustrate the effect of his transient emotions on his style. The first extract is from the second canto of *Childe Harold*; and any one can see that in the first two cantos the mode of expression is much calmer and more regular than in the third, and even than in the fourth. Description of natural objects predominates; and the moral is of a universal kind little affected by personal considerations. The lines on Marathon are a fine sample of composition inspired by this comparatively impersonal temper:

The flying Mede, his shaftless broken bow—
  The fiery Greek, his red pursuing spear;
  Mountains above—Earth's, Ocean's plain below—
  Death in the front, Destruction in the rear!
  Such was the scene—what now remaineth here?
  What sacred Trophy marks the hallowed ground,
  Recording Freedom's smile and Asia's tear?
  The rifled urn, the violated mound,
The dust thy courser's hoof, rude stranger! spurns around.

In all the poems published between the years 1812-

[1] *Byron's Works* (Murray), *Letters and Journal*, vol. v. pp. 362-3.

1815 may be noted an imagery based upon recollections of the East, mixed with a passionate self-portraiture veiled under figures of adventurous romance. The metre chosen is either the octosyllabic iambic, mixed occasionally with anapæsts, after the fashion introduced by Coleridge in *Christabel*, and popularised by Walter Scott, or else the heroic decasyllable with a rhythm expanded beyond the limits of the couplet, and accelerated to suit the movements of "une âme qui se tourmente, un esprit violent."[1] The following passage from *Lara* is representative of Byron's style at this epoch:

'Twas strange—in youth all action and all life,
Burning for pleasure, not averse from strife;
Woman—the Field—the Ocean, all that gave
Promise of gladness, peril, or a grave,
In vain he tried—he ransacked all below,
And found his recompense in joy or woe,
No tame, trite medium; for his feelings sought
In that intenseness an escape from thought:
The Tempest of his heart in scorn had gazed
On that the feebler elements had raised;
The Rapture of his heart had looked on high,
And asked if greater dwelt beyond the sky:
Chained to excess, the slave of each extreme,
How woke he from the wildness of that dream!
Alas! he told not—but he did awake
To curse the withered heart that would not break.

In most of these poems the style, though always careless, often prosaic, and sometimes obscure, is swift and flowing, in harmony with the spirit of action by which it is animated. But in the third canto of *Childe Harold* when, after his separation from his wife, he again takes up the position of moralist *ab extra*, the original features of his genius are strangely modified. Personal emotion, mingling with contemplative philosophy, elevates his thought into grandeur, and distorts it with agony; hence in the following passage—following the magnificent lines on the Battle of Waterloo—it will be observed that where the poet appears to be simply reflecting upon an external object, his expression

[1] *Byron's Works, Letters and Journal*, vol. v. p. 196.

inadequately conveys his meaning; and it is only when his verse becomes the vehicle of his personal feelings that the selection of words and images approaches perfection:

There sunk the greatest, nor the worst of men,
Whose Spirit, antithetically mixed,
One moment of the mightiest, and again
On little objects with like firmness fixed;
Extreme in all things! hadst thou been betwixt,
Thy throne had still been thine, or never been;
For Daring made thy rise as fall: thou seekst
Even now to reassume the imperial mien,
And shake again the world, the Thunderer of the scene!

Conqueror and Captive of the Earth art thou:
She trembles at thee still, and thy wild name
Was ne'er more bruited in men's minds than now
That thou art nothing, save the jest of Fame,
Who wooed thee once, thy Vassal, and became
The flatterer of thy fierceness—till thou wert
A God unto thyself; nor less the same
To the astounded kingdoms all inert,
Who deemed thee for a time whate'er thou didst assert.

Oh, more or less than man—in high or low—
Battling with nations, flying from the field;
Now making monarchs' necks thy footstool, now
More than thy meanest soldier taught to yield;
An Empire thou couldst crush, command, rebuild,
But govern not thy pettiest passion, nor,
However deeply in men's spirits skilled,
Look through thine own, nor curb the lust of War,
Nor learn that tempted Fate will leave the loftiest star.

Yet well thy soul hath brooked the turning tide
With that untaught innate philosophy,
Which, be it Wisdom, Coldness, or deep Pride,
Is gall and wormwood to an enemy,
When the whole host of hatred stood hard by,
To watch and mock thee shrinking, thou hast smiled
With a sedate and all-enduring eye;—
When Fortune fled her spoiled and favourite child,
He stood unbowed beneath the ills upon him piled.

Sager than in thy fortunes; for in them
Ambition steeled thee on too far to show
That just habitual scorn, which could contemn

Men and their thoughts; 'twas wise to feel, not so
To wear it ever on thy lip and brow,
And spurn the instruments thou wert to use
Till they were turned unto thine overthrow:
'Tis but a worthless world to win or lose;
So it hath proved to thee, and all such lot who choose.

If, like a tower upon a headlong rock,
Thou hadst been made to stand or fall alone,
Such scorn of man had helped to brave the shock;
But men's thoughts were the steps which paved thy throne,
Their admiration thy best weapon shone;
The part of Philip's son was thine, not then
(Unless aside thy Purple had been thrown)
Like stern Diogenes to mock at men—
For sceptred Cynics Earth were far too wide a den.

But Quiet to quick bosoms is a Hell
And *there* hath been thy bane; there is a fire
And motion of the Soul which will not dwell
In its own narrow being, but aspire
Beyond the fitting medium of desire;
And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,
Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire
Of aught but rest; a fever at the core,
Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore.

This makes the madmen who have made men mad
By their contagion; Conquerors and Kings,
Founders of sects and systems, to whom add
Sophists, Bards, Statesmen, all unquiet things
Which stir too strongly the soul's secret springs,
And are themselves the fools to those they fool;
Envied, yet how unenviable! what stings
Are theirs! One breast laid open were a school
Which would unteach Mankind the lust to shine or rule.

Their breath is agitation, and their life
A storm whereon they ride, to sink at last,
And yet so nursed and bigoted to strife,
That should their days, surviving perils past,
Melt to calm twilight, they feel overcast
With sorrow and supineness, and so die;
Even as a flame unfed, which runs to waste
With its own flickering, or a sword laid by,
Which eats into itself and rusts ingloriously.

He who ascends to mountain-tops shall find
The loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow;
He who surpasses or subdues mankind,
Must look down on the hate of those below.

Though high *above* the Sun of Glory glow,
And far *beneath* the Earth and Ocean spread,
Round him are icy rocks, and loudly blow
Contending tempests on his naked head,
And thus reward the toils which to those summits led.[1]

The first observation to be made on this is, that, for ethical and didactic purposes, where epigrammatic terseness is required, the metre adopted is scarcely a satisfactory instrument. The length of the Spenser stanzas encourages diffuseness, and, compared with the strong lines at the close of Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* or Goldsmith's *Traveller*, Byron's moralising rhetoric seems languid and pointless. The frequency of the rhymes leads him into weakness (as in the line: "Their admiration thy best weapon *shone*") or unnecessary expansion; and though the substance of the moral is sound and the observation just, the imagery in which it is clothed wants clearness of outline: the poet's impatience prevents him from subduing his thought to the requirements of his verse. Awkwardness of idioms ("nor less the same," for instance); ambiguities or inaccuracies, like "More than thy meanest soldier taught to yield"; confusion of metaphors (*e.g.* "Ambition *steeled*[2] thee on *too far*"); obscurities of epigram (as in the line: "For sceptred Cynics Earth were far too wide a den")—such faults, constantly recurring, mar the effect of the poetical sermon. Throughout it, after his usual fashion, Byron is thinking less of Napoleon than of the likeness between himself and the fallen Emperor: hence it is not until he arrives at the climax, obviously describing his own intimate feelings, that he attains, in the last four stanzas, perfect clearness and simplicity of expression.

His genius encounters less difficulty, and moves more easily, in the style of *ottava rima*, adapted from the serio-comic poets of Italy. From Pulci to Ariosto all this line of poets, as I have already said,[3] had taken for their

[1] *Childe Harold*, Canto iii. 36-45.

[2] Byron's carelessness in the correction of proofs would warrant the conjecture that he wrote "steered," with perhaps a recollection of Dryden's character of Achitophel, who "would steer too near the sands, to boast his wit."

[3] See vol. ii. p. 261.

themes romantic action, but had described it in the attitude of spectators; and Byron, who had from the first shown an imaginative sympathy with the romantic movement in English society, skilfully availed himself, after his expulsion from that society, of the Italian ironic style, as an instrument of satire on the hypocrisies of sentiment in his own country. *Don Juan*, epic in form, is lyrical in spirit. Conscious of the character in which he writes, Byron says of his style with apparent *naïveté*:

> If I have any fault it is digression,
> Leaving my people to proceed alone,
> While I soliloquise beyond expression.[1]

Almost the only actions in which his "people" are engaged are love-adventures: he constantly interrupts himself in the midst of his soliloquies to take blame for his incorrigible habit; and, on such occasions, he gives the reader a glimpse alike of his real motives and of the state of feeling in which he writes, as, for example:

> But I am apt to grow too metaphysical;
> "The time is out of joint,"—and so am I;
> I quite forget this poem's merely quizzical,
> And deviate into matters rather dry.
> I ne'er decide what I shall say, and this I call
> Much too poetical. men should know why
> They write, and for what end; but, note or text,
> I never know the word which will come next.[2]

In this there is no affectation: it is the genuine reflection of the reckless line of conduct, deliberately followed during his Venetian epoch, and of the self-torturing reflection from which he endeavoured to find escape through the channels of self-expression As he says in another place:

> I won't describe,—that is, if I can help
> Description; and I won't reflect,—that is,
> If I can stave off thought, which—as a whelp
> Clings to its teat—sticks to me through the abyss
> Of this odd labyrinth, or as the kelp
> Holds by the rock; or as a lover's kiss
> Drains its first draught of lips —but, as I said,
> I *won't* philosophise, and *will* be read[3]

[1] *Don Juan*, Canto iii. 96 [2] *Ibid.* Canto ix. 41. [3] *Ibid.* Canto x 28

As a natural consequence of this resolution the diction of *Don Juan* is as colloquial as any metrical style can be; and the artistic efforts of the poet are restricted almost entirely to the choice of rhymes. The skill with which unexpected double or treble (*sdrucciolo*) rhymes are made to fall into their proper place in the sentence is generally admirable: here are a few examples:

He could perhaps have passed the Hellespont,
As once (a feat on which ourselves we prided)
Leander, Mr. Ekenhead, and I did.[1]

There's not a sea the passenger e'er pukes in
Turns up more dangerous breakers than the Euxine.[2]

I'll prove that such the opinion of the critic is
From Aristotle *passim*.—See Ποιητικῆς.[3]

Because the publisher declares, in sooth,
Through needles' eyes it easier for the camel is
To pass, than those two cantos into families.[4]

This facility of rhyming was not exhausted in isolated efforts: the following passage shows with what idiomatic precision Byron's unique genius could sustain the cynical satiric style through a whole series of stanzas.

"Where is the World?" cries Young, "at *eighty*—Where
The World in which a man was born?" Alas!
Where is the world of *eight* years past? '*Twas there*—
I look for it—'tis gone, a globe of glass!
Cracked, shivered, vanished, scarcely gazed on, ere
A silent change dissolves the glittering mass.
Statesmen, Chiefs, Orators, Queens, Patriots, Kings,
And Dandies—all are gone on the Wind's wings.

Where is Napoleon the Grand? God knows!
Where little Castlereagh? The Devil can tell!
Where Grattan, Curran, Sheridan,—all those
Who bound the Bar or Senate in their spell?
Where is the unhappy Queen with all her woes?
And where the Daughter whom the Isles loved well?
Where are those martyred Saints the Five per Cents?
And where—oh, where the devil are the Rents?

1 *Don Juan*, Canto ii. 105.
2 *Ibid.* Canto v. 5.
3 *Ibid.* Canto iii. 111.
4 *Ibid.* Canto iv. 97.

Where's Brummell? Dished. Where's Long Pole Wellesley?
Diddled.
Where's Whitbread? Romilly? Where's George the Third?
Where is his will? (That's not so soon unriddled.)
And where is "Fum" the Fourth, our "royal bird"?
Gone down, it seems, to Scotland to be fiddled
Unto by Sawney's violin, we have heard:
"Caw me, Caw thee"—for six months hath been hatching
This scene of royal itch and loyal scratching.

Where is Lord This? And where my Lady That?
The honourable Mistresses and Misses?
Some laid aside like an old Opera hat,
Married, unmarried, and remarried: (this is
An evolution oft performed of late.)
Where are the Dublin shouts—and London hisses?
Where are the Grenvilles? Turned as usual. Where
My friends the Whigs? Exactly where they were.

Where are the Lady Carolines and Franceses?
Divorced or doing thereanent. Ye annals
So brilliant, where the list of routs and dances is,—
Thou *Morning Post*, sole record of the panels
Broken in carriages, and all the phantasies
Of fashion—say what streams now fill those channels?
Some die, some fly, some languish on the Continent,
Because the times have hardly left them *one* tenant.

Some who once set their caps at cautious dukes,
Have taken up at length with younger brothers:
Some heiresses have bit at sharpers' hooks:
Some maids have been made wives, some merely mothers.
Others have lost their fresh and fairy looks:
In short the list of alterations bothers.
There's little strange in this, but something strange is
The unusual quickness of these common changes.

Talk not of seventy years as age; in seven
I have seen more changes, down from monarchs to
The humblest individual under heaven,
Than might suffice a moderate century through
I knew that nought was lasting, but now even
Change grows too changeable, without being new:
Nought's permanent among the human race,
Except the Whigs *not* getting into place[1]

In judging of Byron's dramatic style, if justice is to be done to it, we ought always to bear in mind the

[1] *Don Juan*, Canto XI 76-82

lyrical mood which is its inspiring motive. He has sometimes been criticised as if he were primarily an artist. But the cold principle "Art for art's sake" was abhorrent to his genius. He was the Avatar of the revolutionary movement, whose every thought was prompted by revolt against the moral postulates of society and steeped in the passionate desire for self-expression. To expect a spirit so active and impatient to be always in search of words answering to shades and niceties of perception, is to set up a false standard of judgment. Matthew Arnold cites the following, from a speech of Lucifer in *Cain*, as an illustration of Byron's "unknowingness and want of humour":

Thy human mind hath scarcely grasp to gather
The little I have shown thee into calm
And clear thought: and *thou* wouldst go on aspiring
To the great double Mysteries! the *two Principles*![1]

Of course if Byron had intended *Cain* to be a real drama, fit for representation on the stage, to make the Devil refer to the Manichæan philosophy would have been an absurdity; though the poet might still have sheltered himself behind the authority of Shakespeare, who, in his *Troilus and Cressida*, makes Hector quote Aristotle. But in this, as in all his plays, Byron is so plainly using the dramatic form merely as a vehicle for his own thought, that to judge it by an absolute standard of criticism seems the height of pedantry. Gifford pleased Byron by declaring the first act of *Marino Faliero* to be "genuine English"; and so it is. The simplicity, the clearness, the nervous strength of the diction, and the free movement of the blank verse, are evidence of the amplitude of the poet's vocabulary, and of his acquaintance with the best models of English dramatic writing. Though rapidity of composition led him sometimes into grammatical errors,—such as

There is no traitor like
He whose domestic treason plants the poniard
Within the breast which trusted to his truth,[2]

[1] *Cain*, Act ii. Sc. 2, 401-4. See M. Arnold, *Poetry of Byron*, p. xxii.
[2] *Marino Faliero*, Act iv. Sc. 1, 302.

or

Let *He* who made thee answer that[1]—

the swiftness and strength of his rhetorical style carry the attention away from these minute blots. In the same way the general vastness of his conceptions swallows up petty quibbles of diction, *e.g.*:

We leave a nobler monument than Egypt
Hath piled in her brick mountains, o'er dead kings
Or kine[2]—

and metrical jingles which M. Arnold cites as a proof of Byron's insensibility "to the true artist's fine passion for the correct use and consummate management of words," *e.g.*:

All shall be void,
Destroyed.[3]

The recklessness, the slovenliness, and the frequent obscurity of Byron's dramatic diction must be judged as features in that character by force of which he was what he was, in poetry as well as in life, and which unceasingly insisted on self-expression even in poetical situations of apparently purely objective interest; as in the following passage of *Marino Faliero* where the Doge addresses his plebeian fellow-conspirators.

DOGE. Ye, though you know and feel our mutual mass
Of - - . . . .
. .

Lurks in the present institutes of Venice.
All these men were my friends; I loved them, they
Requited honourably my regards;
We served and fought, we smiled and wept in concert;
We revelled or we sorrowed side by side,
We made alliances of blood and marriage;
We grew in years and honours fairly,—till
Their own desire, not my ambition, made
Them choose me for their Prince, and then farewell!
Farewell all social memory! all thoughts
In common! and sweet bonds which link old friendships,
When the survivors of long years and actions,
Which now belong to history, soothe the days

[1] *Cain*, Act ii. Sc. 2, 88 [2] *Sardanapalus*, Act v. Sc 1, 483-4.
[3] *Heaven and Earth*, Part i Sc. 3, 94-5. See M. Arnold, *Poetry of Byron*, pp. xiv xv.

Which yet remain by treasuring each other,
And never meet but each beholds the mirror
Of half a century on his brother's brow,
And sees a hundred beings, now in earth,
Flit round them whispering of the days gone by,
And seeming not all dead, as long as two
Of the brave, joyous, reckless, glorious, band,
Which once were one and many, still retain
A breath to sigh for them, a tongue to speak
Of deeds that else were silent, save on marble—
Oimè! Oimè!—and must I do this deed?

I. BERTUCCIO. My Lord, you are much moved: it is not now
That such things must be dwelt upon.

DOGE. Your patience
A moment—I recede not: mark with me
The gloomy vices of this government.
From the hour they made me Doge, the Doge THEY *made*
me—
Farewell the past! I died to all that had been,
Or rather they to me: no friends, no kindness,
No privacy of life—all were cut off:
They came not near me—such approach gave umbrage;
They could not love me—such was not the law;
They thwarted me—'twas the state's policy;
They baffled me—'twas a patrician's duty;
They wronged me—for such was to right the state;
They could not right me—that would give suspicion;
So that I was a slave to my own subjects;
So that I was a foe to my own friends;
Begirt with spies for guards, with robes for power,
With pomp for freedom, gaolers for a council,
Inquisitors for friends, and Hell for life!
I had only one fount of quiet left,
And *that* they poisoned! My pure household gods
Were shivered on my hearth, and o'er their shrine
Sat grinning Ribaldry and sneering Scorn.[1]

It is not too much to say that these lines, read in connection with the incidents of Byron's life, and with his own judgment of them as expressed in his letters and journals, condense into themselves a complete abstract of his poetical as well as of his moral character. He is above all other poets the spoiled child of genius. Of ancient and noble lineage, born with passions and ambitions, equally

[1] *Marino Faliero*, Act iii. Sc. 2, 314-64.

precocious and powerful, he sought from a very early age to realise by the exertion of will all that his mind conceived as desirable. Thwarted by external forces, his spirit turned inwards and preyed on its own thoughts. A rigid training in the doctrines of extreme Calvinism, while it drove him into rebellion against the dogmas of the Christian faith, rooted in his mind the idea of Predestination, which his introspective imagination associated inseparably with the history of his family. Self-conscious vanity, often the companion of great genius, produced in him an anti-social shyness, and inclined him to solitary meditation; consciousness of the possession of high powers, on the other hand, made him passionately desirous of active fame: the conflict in his mind between these contrary forces resulted in the forms of morbid self-expression which are the characteristic feature of his poetry. A passage in his correspondence with Miss Milbanke, written when he was the idol of the fashionable world, seems to be a faithful revelation of his most intimate feelings:

> I by no means rank poetry or poets high in the scale of intellect. This may look like affectation, but it is my real opinion. It is the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake. They say poets never or rarely go *mad*. Cowper and Collins are instances to the contrary (but Cowper was no poet). It is, however, to be remarked that they rarely do, but are generally so near it that I cannot help thinking rhyme is so far useful in anticipating and preventing the disorder. I prefer the talents of action—of war, of the senate, or even of science,—to all the speculations of those mere dreamers of another existence (I don't mean religiously but fancifully) and spectators of this apathy. Disgust and perhaps incapacity have rendered me now a mere spectator, but I have occasionally mixed in the active and tumultuous departments of existence, and on these alone my recollection rests with any satisfaction, though not the best parts of it.[1]

But no form of action recognised as lawful by a free society was adequate for an imagination constantly

[1] Letter to Miss Milbanke of 10th November 1813.

striving to convert its own visions into reality. As he said of Napoleon:

> There is a fire
> And motion of the soul which will not dwell
> In its own narrow being;

and once confined within limits imposed on him by law as well as custom, it was morally inevitable that he should break out of bounds. So long as he was left at liberty by a society which flattered him, he could satisfy his scorn of his surroundings by romantic portraits of the wicked self seen in his own imagination; but so soon as judgment was pronounced against him for his violation of established order, he constituted himself the satirist of his judges. Maintaining his attitude of self-condemnation, previously exerted against professedly fictitious personages like Childe Harold, he altogether refused to recognise the judicial authority of a social court which he asserted to be the representative of Cant and Hypocrisy.

It is the mixture in his genius of the twofold principle of contemplation and action that makes Byron the most complete representative of the romantic movement in English Poetry. His temper was equally removed from the monastic Nature-worship of the Solitary, which Wordsworth sought to erect into a religious standard suited to the wants of historic society, and from the active idealism of Shelley, which aimed at overthrowing the institutions of that society in favour of Utopias existing only in a poetical imagination. He was at one and the same time the romantic satirist of social romanticism, and a rebel against the established code of religion and morals which Wordsworth and the Lake School, after depreciating it in their youth, came to regard as the bulwark of all that was valuable in society. Byron's fundamental error of judgment lay in identifying this code with the "cant" of that portion of society of which he was himself a leading representative, and the corruption of which he was justified in satirising. Catiline was a type of the vices paramount in the governing society of Rome; yet his

conspiracy failed because the genius of Rome had a vitality deeper and wider than the character of those who ruled it. In the same way Byron "free," as he said, "of the corporation" of English oligarchical society, heir of its reckless wit, master of its polished idioms, failed to perceive that the Puritan leaven, mixed in that, as in every other class in the community, was the product of ancient historic forces, the strength of which could not be measured by any single imagination. Like Catiline, he dashed himself against a solid body of national sentiment, and met the Roman's fate. He always writes as a nobleman, and avails himself, for his own purposes, of that refined colloquial style which, since the Restoration, had established a dominant influence in English poetry. Hence the vast effect which his genius produced upon the taste of his generation. In so far as he represented the great qualities of an aristocracy which for more than a hundred years had swayed the destinies of England, his verse reflects, with extreme brilliance, the characteristics of the English classical style. His passionate love of political Liberty, illustrated in his lines on "The Isles of Greece" and in the opening of *The Giaour*; his lofty ethical vein, exemplified in the grand stanzas on the Battle of Waterloo and the address to the Ocean in *Childe Harold*; the often beautiful flow of his lyric verse, as in "The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold," or "She walks in beauty like the night"; —in all these directions his genius has produced work of imperishable excellence.

But he was at the same time the representative of the oligarchic spirit in its decline; and, viewed in this light, his poetry is of unequal merit. As the satirist of aristocratic corruption in the days of the Regency, he is remarkably successful. His transformation of the light Whistlecraft style, introduced by Frere, into an instrument of reflection on manners is masterly in its skill; nor is the well-bred gaiety of *Beppo* marred by the savage cynicism which runs riot in *Don Juan*. As a retaliation for an unprovoked attack the satire in

The Vision of Judgment is justifiable; and the execution of the mixed design of that poem leaves nothing to be desired.

Byron, however, was for a time the poetical spokesman of fashionable Romanticism in English society; and, as the groundwork of that taste was essentially shallow and unreal, it is this part of his work which shows the least vitality. In all the poems published between his return from his travels and the separation from his wife, he too evidently attempts to disguise his own personality under a romantic mask. No doubt to the "Lady Carolines and Lady Franceses" of the day the airs and graces of his Childe Harolds, and Conrades, and Laras, were irresistible; but to a generation which has cares of its own to occupy it they seem only the attitudes of a poser. Byron, in himself and his misfortunes, will always be an object of interest; but Byron exhibiting himself as a dandy outlaw before a society which he despises makes a somewhat contemptible figure. A consciousness of the want of substance in his own romantic creations no doubt intensified the cynical reaction of *Don Juan*.

The striking contrast between the genius of Byron and that of Wordsworth affords an instructive comment on the critical theory of poetry formulated by the latter, which I have already discussed. Byron carried Wordsworth's individualising principle to its furthest logical extreme. His own thoughts, his own sentiments, his own passions, were invariably the subject of his verse. Like Wordsworth he was driven by circumstances to find solace in solitary communion with Nature; but, unlike him, his soul in the midst of Nature was devoured with the craving for action and the thirst of social ambition. While the Lake poet, after discarding his early revolutionary idealism, satisfied himself with framing a philosophy of Nature based on quiet contemplation, Byron at first attempted to give a personal and romantic dress to revolutionary sentiment, and afterwards, when his rupture with society was complete, sought for suitable epic and dramatic forms of verse in which to

express his contempt for the moral standards of his country. This opposition in their respective attitudes produced a marked antagonism of poetical style. Wordsworth's purely contemplative principle led him almost inevitably into prosaic modes of expression: Byron, on the contrary, in his quarrel with his countrymen, never failed to assimilate forms of poetry consecrated by historic usage, and to express himself in metrical idioms which, while based on the conversation of the most polished contemporary society, were capable of being naturalised in long-established forms of English verse. The genius of both poets was essentially lyrical. High as it was in each case, in view of the fact that the greatest poetry must in some sense always be a reflection of social action, neither of them can be said to have attained to the rank of the "three mighty men"—Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton. Their poetry lacks the "universal" element, in the widest sense of the word, so largely present in the work of their great predecessors. Wordsworth's excessive indulgence of individuality ended in imaginative monasticism; Byron's betrayed him into moral anarchy.

CHAPTER IX

ROMANTICISM IN ENGLISH POETRY

The Poetry of Revolutionary Idealism: Percy Bysshe Shelley

THE genius of Shelley on one side resembles that of Wordsworth, on another that of Byron; but the principles on which he acted were carried to such a height that, in its total result, his poetry remains unique, and serves as a mirror solely of the extraordinary personality by which it was inspired. Like Wordsworth, he believed in the power of the mind to re-create Nature according to its own image; but whereas Wordsworth, when he found that his revolutionary theories led in practice to consequences which he had not foreseen, retraced his steps, and, in his latter days, adapted his ideas to suit his social environment, Shelley continued to the end of his life to view Nature, Men, and the institutions of Society through the modifying light of the revolutionary philosophy which he assumed as the starting-point of action. Like Byron, the practice of his principles necessarily brought him into collision with the established opinions of historic society; like him, he persisted in his rebellion against them; but Byron did not question the legitimate authority of what was established: his rebellion was that of a Catiline—inspired by pride, passion, and contempt for his fellows—against what he held to be the cant of the community which formed the court of judgment: Shelley's revolt was in favour of abstract ideas, which he

strove to make the rule of conduct, in the place of those that he believed to be the fruits of ignorance and the instruments of tyranny. His unqualified assertion of the rights of individual opinion as opposed to general judgment necessarily demanded an abstract mode of expression, so that while Wordsworth and Byron, in their respective styles, keep in touch with the common sense of men, Shelley's mode of composition is that of a disembodied spirit, seeking so to etherealise metrical language as to make it the vehicle of purely individual perceptions.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born at Field Place, near Horsham, on the 4th of August 1792. As not seldom happens with old stocks, his family, one of great antiquity in the county of Sussex, had begun to develop. types of eccentricity. His grandfather, Sir Bysshe Shelley, though a man of large fortune, exhibited a mania for hoarding money. He lived in a small cottage at Horsham, and was, says an acquaintance, "as indifferent to his personal appearance as to his style of living. He wore a round frock, and passed a portion of his time in the tap-room of the Swan Inn at Horsham, not drinking indeed with its frequenters, but arguing with them in politics."[1] He amassed a fortune of more than £100,000 beyond the family estate, real and personal, which he inherited. His son Timothy, who succeeded him in the baronetcy, was a more commonplace person, being a steady adherent of the Whig party in politics (he represented New Shoreham in Parliament), and attentive to all the duties of a country gentleman; but marked individuality soon showed itself in the character of the grandson. The latter, after being put under a tutor, Mr. Edwards of Warnham, when six years old, was removed at the age of ten to Sion House Academy, Isleworth, and seems to have there acquired the same reputation for unsociability as at Eton, whither he was sent in 1804. Dr. Goodall was Head-master of Eton at the time, and Shelley's tutor was George Bethell, a man of small acquirements, quite unfitted to understand the needs of his gifted pupil's peculiar disposition Among

[1] Cited in Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. pp 3, 4

his schoolfellows he was known as "mad" Shelley. He did not join in their games, rebelled against fagging, and consequently became the victim of many a "Shelley bait." On the other hand, he read a good deal by himself, especially in the direction of romance and revolutionary political philosophy, while he found amusement in chemical experiments, such as the making of fire-balloons and the electrification of cats. In these he was assisted by Dr. Lind, a retired naval surgeon, whom Shelley has idealised in *Prince Athanase* under the name of Zonoras. Dr. Lind, it is said, prevented Mr. Timothy Shelley from sending Percy, when recovering from a fever, to a private mad-house. The boy's scientific studies were not very systematic: he was much more interested in the development of the visions of Alchemy—such as the discovery of the elixir of life and similar dreams of "magic"—than in the analysis of the laws of nature; and, when he left Eton for Oxford in 1810, was the disciple of Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus rather than of Sir Humphry Davy.

Dreams as to material possibilities soon took the shape of romantic fiction. Even while at Eton he and his cousin Medwin collaborated on a romance called *Nightmare* and a poem on the subject of the Wandering Jew. His wild and glowing imagination, unchecked by judgment or any sense of external reality and proportion, fed greedily on the drugs of German supernaturalism, the fumes of which were then intoxicating the fancy of the English youth; at the same time he absorbed a smattering of French philosophy through the medium of Godwin's *Political Justice*. These various elements, acting on an intelligence partly creative and partly analytic, found expression in a novel called *Zastrozzi*, which it is said was actually purchased in 1810 by a publisher called Robinson for forty pounds. This story is utterly incoherent in action and invertebrate in structure; but in it the curious may examine the first efforts of a powerful imagination, taught by Matthew Lewis to conceive and by William Godwin to speculate. No promise indeed is given, in the lumbering verse intermingled with the narrative, of the fluent and

spiritual music which overflows in *Prometheus Unbound*; but in the other essential features of action, character, and sentiment may be discovered the embryo of *The Revolt of Islam*.

On April 10, 1810, Shelley matriculated at University College, Oxford: he began his residence there in the Michaelmas term of the same year. Holding aloof from the ordinary undergraduate society of the college, he formed a close friendship with Hogg, his future biographer, a man clear-sighted, somewhat cynical, and in everything the opposite of himself. He read voraciously, following his own impulse, and without any reference to mental discipline, and in his second term embodied his philosophic opinions in a leaflet called *The Necessity of Atheism*. A copy of this production he told the booksellers he had sent "to every bishop on the bench, to the Vice-Chancellor, to each of the heads of houses; and accompanying each copy was a pretty letter in his own handwriting, with the signature of 'Jeremiah Stukeley,' the latest Avatar of Percy Bysshe Shelley, an incarnation assumed for this special occasion."[1] As happened to him all through his life, he seems to have been incapable of foreseeing the consequence of his action in the constituted order of things. Summoned before the authorities of his college, and asked whether he was the author of the leaflet, he refused to answer; whereupon he was presented with a formal order of expulsion.

"I have been with Shelley in many trying situations of his after-life," says Hogg, "but I never saw him so deeply shocked and so cruelly agitated as on this occasion. . . . He sat on the sofa, repeating with convulsive vehemence the words 'Expelled! expelled!' his head shaking with emotion, and his whole frame quivering."[2]

Hogg, who chivalrously wrote to the Master and Fellows requesting them to reconsider their sentence against his friend, was also called before them, and having, like Shelley, refused to answer the questions put to him,

[1] Dowden, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. i. pp. 118 19.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 120.

was subjected to the same penalty. The sentence was executed against both on the 25th March 1811. No doubt the college authorities would have acted both more kindly and more wisely if, in dealing with two inexperienced undergraduates, they had proceeded to enforce discipline more gently and deliberately; but in the Draconic methods of the time this was hardly to be expected; and nothing could have been more unreasonable than for Shelley, in view of the nature of his offence, when answering the questions put to him, to accuse his judges of "tyranny and injustice" and "vulgar violence."

On hearing of this expulsion from Oxford, Timothy Shelley wrote to his son requiring him to make his submission to his college, and to sever his connection with Hogg, whom the father regarded as the corrupter of his principles. Both conditions were refused, and for some time Shelley, being left, through his disobedience to his father, without resources, was obliged to subsist on such help as was given him by his mother and sisters or Hogg, and on loans advanced to him by booksellers. An arrangement with his father was at last made, through the friendly intervention of the Duke of Norfolk and Shelley's uncle, Captain Pinfold, by which he was to receive £200 a year without conditions. It was as certain as anything human could be that a young man of Shelley's disposition, in this state of comparative pecuniary independence, would now involve himself in some complication of love. He had already been enamoured of his cousin, Harriet Grove, who is said to have had a hand in the romance of *Zastrozzi*, and a half-engagement to her had been broken off on account of his opinions. He next formed an enthusiastic Platonic friendship with Elizabeth Hitchener, a school-mistress, ten years older than himself, with whom he carried on a voluminous correspondence about virtue, reason, sentiment, and all other matters touched on in the Godwinian philosophy. This odd relationship might have ended in more serious complications, but in the midst of it an appeal was made to Shelley which resulted in his marriage with Harriet Westbrook.

Shelley's first wife was the younger daughter of a retired tavern-keeper. As a schoolfellow of his sisters at Mrs. Fenning's school at Clapham, she had made his acquaintance after his expulsion from Oxford, and had received from him a present of his novel, *St. Irvyne.* Though she was only sixteen years old, he had endeavoured to inoculate her, as he did everybody he met, with the principles which he held to be the true basis of society. Having her head turned with these high-flown notions, Harriet proceeded to put them into practice. She found occasion for revolt in a petty matter of girl-school discipline, and protested against returning to Clapham: when her friends naturally declined to let her have her way, she wrote despairingly to Shelley, who was then paying a visit to a cousin at Cwm Elan in Radnorshire, representing the despotism to which she was a victim, and throwing herself on his protection. Shelley hesitated scarcely a moment as to the line of action he should adopt. He was not deeply in love; but with the enthusiastic chivalry, which is so attractive a feature in his character, he made up his mind that it was his duty to answer the appeal of a persecuted girl who had bestowed her affection on him, and to whom Hogg represented that he ought to bind himself by the legal ceremony of marriage. Accordingly he made preparations for carrying her off from London; and on the 28th of August 1811 was united to her, according to the forms of the Scotch Law, at Edinburgh, under the name and description of Percy Bysshe Shelley, farmer, Sussex.

Harriet appears to have been a girl of amiable and pleasing manners, with quickness enough to take a superficial interest in Shelley's revolutionary opinions, but without any of the intellectual enthusiasm required to enlist her sympathy in the constant changes of his imaginative moods. This want had still to be supplied by correspondence or intercourse with Miss Hitchener, and by the society of his friend Hogg. Shelley had written to the former, with some apprehension, to inform her of his marriage with Harriet Westbrook, and was greatly relieved

to find that she received the news with generous sympathy. "Thou art a sister of my soul,"—he wrote to her, after receiving her letter, in anticipation of the image he afterwards applied in *Epipsychidion* to Emilia Viviani:—"*he*" (no doubt Hogg) "is its brother." In this latter belief he soon received a rude shock. After residing in Edinburgh for about five weeks after his marriage, he was seized with a longing to join Hogg in York. Having taken lodgings there, and finding that, being hard-pressed for money, he would have to go into Sussex to make, if possible, some arrangement with his father, he started for the South, leaving his wife in his friend's charge. On his return from an unsuccessful expedition he learned that Hogg had, in his absence, made advances to Harriet, who had repelled them with indignation. It became necessary therefore to break off all intercourse with the unfaithful friend, and the Shelleys, leaving York secretly, took up their abode in Keswick. There they stayed from November 1811 till February 1812, embarrassed for some time by their financial difficulties, from which they were extricated by the consent of Mr. Westbrook to allow Harriet £200 a year, and Mr. Timothy Shelley's agreement to pay the same amount to his son. At Keswick Shelley made the acquaintance of Southey, who treated him with hospitality, and whose society he enjoyed, till he came to the conclusion that Southey was a hireling, working in the service of a tyrannical Government.

From Keswick Shelley and his wife proceeded to Ireland in the hope of bringing about a social revolution in that island. The Irish people were then being stirred by the first movements in behalf of Catholic Emancipation. Shelley, on the other hand, dreamed of a state of things calculated "to shake Catholicism on its basis, and to induce Quakerish and Socinian principles of politics"; principles which he had embodied in an "Address to the Irish People," written in anticipation of his crusade before he left Keswick. As both parties, however, were opposed to the existing political order, the strange allies met on the same platform in a meeting of Irish patriots

at the Fishamble Street Theatre in Dublin, where Shelley made a speech in which his hatred of Catholicism was sufficiently disguised by his denunciation of English tyranny to win the applause of his audience. His next design was to form an Association of Philanthropists for the regeneration of Ireland, the methods of this being explained in a second pamphlet, which he sent to the printers for publication; but his campaign was suddenly cut short by the intervention of William Godwin, with whom he had entered into correspondence, and whom he was prepared to obey as his spiritual father. Godwin represented to his disciple that he was too young to instruct the world, and that such an Association as he contemplated would probably only lead to the bloodshed which had accompanied the French Revolution. Shelley, though he questioned the soundness of the reasoning, submitted to the authority of his political director.

"Fear no more," he wrote to him, "for any violence or hurtful measures in which I may be instrumental in Dublin. My mind is now by no means settled on the subject of associations; they appear to me in one point of view useful, in another deleterious. I acquiesce in your decisions. I am neither haughty, reserved, nor unpersuadable. I hope that time will show your pupil to be more worthy of your regard than you have hitherto found him; at all events that he will never be otherwise than sincere and true to you."[1]

The pamphlet was accordingly withdrawn from circulation, and the Shelleys, leaving Dublin, at the beginning of April proceeded to Wales, where for some time they occupied a house at Nantgwillt, in the neighbourhood of Cwm Elan. This they left in June, and took up their abode at Lynmouth on the north coast of Devonshire. All this time Shelley had been pouring out his soul in letters to his Egeria, Miss Hitchener. She was "the Trinity of his Essence";[2] "the Star of Peace" to which the growing spirit of Republicanism in South America

[1] Dowden's *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. i. p. 276.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 234.

was to look for hope and guidance.[1] Reports as to the scandalous character of their friendship had spread in Sussex. On hearing of them Shelley's indignation rose to boiling heat.

"You are," he wrote to her from Nantgwillt, "to my fancy as a thunder-riven pinnacle of rock, firm amid the rushing tempest and the boiling surge. Ay, stand firm for ever, and when our ship anchors close to thee, the crew will cover thee with flowers!"[2]

By Shelley and herself Miss Hitchener's Christian name, Elizabeth, was altered to Portia, though, as the more prosaic Harriet could not reconcile herself to the change, she was allowed, in consideration of her human weakness, to address her friend as plain "Bessie." Mr. Hitchener had forbidden his daughter to continue her relations with Shelley; but of course the purposed "tyranny" proved futile, and Portia joined the party at Lynmouth, where she helped Shelley to embark copies of a new "Declaration of Rights," sealed up in bottles or boxes, in the hope of their being picked up by vessels at sea. This characteristic method of propagating Revolutionary principles passed without notice, but when Shelley's servant took to posting on land the "Declaration of Rights," in the shape of bills, public attention was aroused, and the poet was placed under observation. To escape from espionage Shelley, his wife, and Miss Hitchener, at the end of August, left Lynmouth, and pitched their wandering tents for a time in Tremadoc, a small town on the coast of Carnarvonshire. By this migration they missed a visit from Godwin, with whom Shelley had continued to correspond, and who, having resolved to pay a visit to his disciple in his cottage at Lynmouth, arrived there about three weeks after the others had flitted from it.

At Tremadoc Shelley's imagination was excited by the sight of an embankment which, though nearly completed, was left unfinished for lack of funds; and

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. p. 255. [2] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 276.

within a month of his arrival, he was on his way to London to collect subscriptions for bringing the work to a successful issue. In London he met for the first time his chief "guide, philosopher, and friend." Godwin's establishment was strangely mixed. It was a bookseller's shop, presided over by the philosopher himself and his second wife, who was the most active partner in the business. By her first husband she had two children, one of whom, Jane Clairmont, lived with her in Skinner Street. Besides, the house found room for Fanny—daughter by Gilbert Imlay of Godwin's first wife—his own daughter, Mary, whose mother, Mary Woolstonecraft, had died in giving her birth, and William his son by his then wife, a boy of nine years old. The second Mrs. Godwin seems to have been of a character far from attractive. Charles Lamb describes her at the time of her marriage with the philosopher as "a very disgusting woman, who wears green spectacles";[1] she was certainly successful in embroiling the elements of her heterogeneous family.

Brought into personal connection with this society, Shelley, as might have been confidently anticipated by any one acquainted with the world and human character, rid himself rapidly of certain illusions, but rushed with equal vehemence into opposite imaginative extremes The first victim of the new circumstances was the unfortunate Miss Hitchener. A few weeks' close intercourse with the poor woman had served to divest her of the glamour with which distance had surrounded her; Harriet was jealous of her; and her sins were increased by her failure to appreciate the philosophical perfections of Godwin. The "sister" of Shelley's "soul," "the Trinity of his Essence," the "rock that was to be crowned with flowers by the mariners anchoring at its side," was now discovered to be a "brown demon." "She is a woman," he wrote to a friend, "of desperate views and dreadful passions, but of cool and undeviating revenge."[2] And again: "My astonishment at my fatuity, inconsistency,

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol i p. 305.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 313.

and bad taste, was never so great as after living for four months with her as an inmate. What would Hell be were such a woman in Heaven?"[1] Miss Hitchener had to be and was dismissed, with the promise of an annuity; which, whether paid or not, was at least a sign of Shelley's good intentions towards one whom he felt that he had most unjustifiably injured.

After a stay in London of about two months Shelley, with his wife and her sister, Eliza Westbrook, suddenly returned to Tremadoc. It does not appear that he thought much more about his passing impulse to collect money for the embankment; but his imagination was excited while in Wales by the execution of fourteen "Luddites" for frame-breaking, and still more by the imprisonment of the brothers Hunt for their libel in *The Examiner* on the Prince Regent. To Leigh Hunt he at once sent a sum which he happened to have by him, together with an offer which the other calls "princely," and which, if it had been accepted, Shelley would of course have found himself unable to make good. These political incidents stimulated him to the completion of his poem, *Queen Mab*, which was finished about the middle of February 1813. Almost immediately afterwards his residence at Tremadoc was brought to a close by one of those visionary adventures in which he was constantly an actor. He believed himself to have been attacked twice at night by an assassin, of whom he himself was the only witness, and in the state of nervous excitement produced by the imaginary occurrence, he, his wife, and her sister Eliza, who lived with them, fled from Tanyrallt and took up their temporary abode at Dublin. Thence they moved in a few days to Killarney, and by the end of March were once more on the wing for London.

In London they kept moving about from one place to another—Cook's Hotel in Albemarle Street, Half-Moon Street, and some unnamed quarters in Pimlico—till June, when their daughter Ianthe was born, an event celebrated by Shelley in a sonnet resembling in feeling that composed

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. p. 314.

by Coleridge on the birth of his first-born son.[1] The circle of their acquaintance was increased by several families attached to the Godwin coterie; and on the female portion of these Shelley now lavished the idealistic worship which, since the overthrow of Miss Hitchener, had been left without any external object. In the company of Mrs. Newton, Mrs. Boinville, and her daughter, Mrs. Turner, he studied Italian poetry, and presently made one of his numerous migrations to Bracknell, a village in Berkshire, where the little society could indulge without interruption their sympathies on the subjects of virtue, vegetarianism, and philanthropy. Financial difficulties were at present the only obstacles to ideal enjoyment. Mr. Timothy Shelley was still alienated from his son, and it was only by means of post-obits that the latter could raise money enough to provide for his own necessities and for the relief of the philosopher, Godwin, who even at this period seems to have discovered that a young man with Shelley's expectations might be useful in extricating him from his pecuniary embarrassments. A bond for £2000 procured £500 in ready money, and with this the Shelleys and their sister-in-law were enabled to make an expedition to the Lakes, and afterwards to Edinburgh, whence in December they returned to London.

Up to this time there had been no dissensions between husband and wife; but it is evident that, as in the case of Byron's marriage, there was complete incompatibility of temper. Harriet had grown out of the period of schoolgirl idealism, and her mind was now occupied rather with the difficulties raised by duns and post-obits than with schemes for elevating the human race. Shelley, on the contrary, remained unaffected by experience, and as soon as one vision faded, soared to another on the wings of imagination. In these he was sustained by other female sympathies, and it may readily be conceived that, as with

[1] See the sonnet cited in Mr. Dowden's *Life*, vol. i. p. 376:

> More dear art thou, O frail and fragile blossom;
> Dearest when most thy tender traits express
> The image of thy mother's loveliness,

and compare Coleridge's sonnet beginning, "Charles, my slow heart."

Coleridge, jealousy and irritation on the side of the wife, disenchantment on the part of the husband, produced a state of things which made home-life intolerable.

"I have been staying with Mrs. B[oinville] for the last month," writes Shelley to Hogg, from Bracknell, on 16th March 1814: "I have escaped in the society of all that philosophy and friendship combine, from the dismaying solitude of myself. They have revived in my heart the expiring flame of life. I have felt myself translated to a paradise, which has nothing of mortality but its transitoriness; my heart sickens at the view of that necessity, which will quickly divide me from the delightful tranquillity of this happy home—for it has become my home. The trees, the bridge, the minutest objects, have already a place in my affections."[1]

The following extracts from Shelley's poetry mark clearly the gradual changes of mood in his affection for his wife. In the first year of his marriage, before the bloom had faded from his idealism, he wrote of her at Cwm Elan:

O thou! whose virtues latest known,
First in this heart yet claimst a throne;
Whose downy sceptre still shall share
The gentle sway with virtue there;
Thou fair in form, and pure in mind,
Whose ardent friendship rivets fast
The flowery band our fates that bind,
Which incorruptible shall last
When duty's hard and cold control
Has thawed around the burning soul;
The gloomiest retrospects, that bind
With crowns of thorn the bleeding mind;
The prospects of most doubtful hue,
That rise on Fancy's shuddering view;
Are gilt by the reviving ray
Which thou hast flung upon my day.[2]

And about the same time he addressed her in a poem written in blank verse, in which he says:

Nor when life's æstival sun
To deeper manhood shall have ripened me;
Nor when some years have added judgment's store

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. p. 408.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. i. pp. 273-4.

To all thy woman sweetness, all the fire
Which throbs in thine enthusiast heart; not then
Shall holy friendship (for what other name
May love like ours assume?) not even then
Shall custom so corrupt, or the cold forms
Of this desolate world so harden us,
As when we think of the dear love that binds
Our souls in soft communion, while we know
Each other's thoughts and feelings, can we say
Unblushingly a heartless compliment,
Praise, hate, or love, with the unthinking world,
Or dare to cut the unrelaxing nerve
That knits our love to virtue?[1]

About a year later there is an evident change. He addresses a sonnet to his wife on her birthday.

EVENING · TO HARRIET

O thou bright Sun! beneath the dark blue line
Of western distance that sublime descendest,
And gleaming lovelier as thy beams decline
Thy million hues to every vapour lendest,
And over cobweb lawn, and grove, and stream,
Sheddest the liquid magic of thy light,
Till calm Earth, with the parting splendour bright,
Shows like the vision of a beauteous dream;
What gazer now with astronomic eye
Could coldly count the spots within thy sphere?
Such were thy lover, Harriet, could he fly
The thoughts of all that makes his passion dear,
And turning senseless from thy warm caress,
Pick flaws in our close-woven happiness.[2]

In the sonnet to his daughter, he says that her face is dearest to him when it most reminds him of her mother. But some verses written "To Harriet: May 1814," close with the following stanza:

O trust for once no erring guide!
Bid the remorseless feeling flee;
'Tis malice, 'tis revenge, 'tis pride,
'Tis anything but thee;
O deign a nobler pride to prove,
And pity if thou canst not love.[3]

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. pp. 287-8. [2] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 413 14. [3] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 414

It is impossible to determine the exact facts relating to the separation between Shelley and his first wife. They were certainly living together in April 1814, at the time when Shelley wrote to Hogg the letter describing his feelings with regard to his "home" at Bracknell. But at that date the same letter shows that his imagination was occupied by some kind of idealising love, not certainly that of Harriet. He tells Hogg that he has written only "one stanza, which has no meaning":

Thy dewy looks sink in my breast;
  Thy gentle words stir poison there;
Thou hast disturbed the only rest
  That was the portion of despair!
Subdued to Duty's hard control,
  I could have borne my wayward lot:
The chains that bind this ruined soul
  Had cankered then, but crushed it not.[1]

This might refer either to Cornelia Turner—who (so Shelley told Hogg) "inherits all the divinity of her mother"—or to Mary Godwin, with whom he was certainly in love in June 1814. It seems doubtful whether Shelley had seen the latter (at least since she was a child) so early as April 1814: if he had, we might, with some confidence, trace Harriet's resolution to leave him, which she carried into effect during the late spring or summer of this year, to her knowledge of the relations existing between Godwin's daughter and her husband. We know at least that, in July 1814, Harriet and he were living apart; that Shelley was anxious to have a legal form of separation arranged, making an allowance to his wife. It appears, however, from Harriet Shelley's statement to Peacock, that, though she had an interview with her husband on the subject, no agreement was arrived at; and the next act in the drama was the elopement of Mary Godwin with Shelley from her father's house on the 28th of July 1814. They were accompanied by Mary Jane Clairmont, Mrs. Godwin's daughter by her first husband, and were in possession of just money enough to bring them back penniless to London, after a six weeks' tour on the Continent.

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. p. 409.

The social complications produced by the practice of revolutionary philosophy were of the most extraordinary kind. In all directions sordid pecuniary embarrassments interfered with the aspirations of idealism. Finding himself on his return without money, Shelley actually applied to the wife whom he had deserted, and received from her £20. Godwin, on whose principles with regard to marriage Shelley had acted, conceived himself to have been deeply injured by his conduct, and refused to have any dealings with him except through an attorney, but was at the same time quite ready to receive money from him if he could do so without incurring any *apparent* obligation. Hunted by creditors from pillar to post, Shelley, through the winter of 1814, was forced to be perpetually shifting his lodgings, and obtained no relief from his difficulties while his grandfather was alive. The will of Sir Bysshe Shelley, who died in January 1815, was most complicated. By a settlement of the Shelley property, made in 1792, it was in the power of the poet and his father to bring the entail to an end at Sir Bysshe's death; but the latter, in the hope of keeping the estates together, left all the real and personal property, over which he had full control, disposed in such a way that, unless his grandson consented to prolong the entail of the old estates, none of the unsettled property would come into his possession. It was at first thought at least possible for Shelley and his father to cut the entail of the settlement of 1792; and an arrangement was made on this basis which enabled Sir Timothy to purchase his son's interest by an annuity of £1000 to be secured to the latter as a rent charge on some of the estates, and by a considerable sum of ready money advanced for the payment of the poet's debts. After a time it was discovered that this arrangement could not be carried out, since the intentions of the testator with regard to the unsettled estates would thereby be frustrated. Shelley, whose dealings with Godwin were throughout distinguished by generosity and gentlemanly feeling, as soon as the negotiations with his father were finished, paid the philosopher £1000, and at a later

date sent him a cheque to relieve him from fresh pressure by his creditors. This Godwin refused to receive in the form in which it was drawn. "I return your cheque," he wrote to Shelley, "because no consideration can induce me to utter a cheque drawn by you and containing my name." He would however receive the money if it was made "payable to Joseph Hume or James Martin"!

Relieved from his immediate financial embarrassments, Shelley now looked for a house in the country, and at last settled at Bishopsgate, near Windsor, where, in January 1816, a son was born to him by Mary Godwin. Here in the autumn of 1815 was written *Alastor*. After the Court of Chancery had decided that Sir Timothy Shelley could not purchase his son's reversion, the poet made up his mind to leave Bishopsgate and live on the Continent. In May 1816 he, Mary Godwin, and Jane Clairmont, resided for a time in a hotel near Geneva, where they made Byron's acquaintance, and continued to move about in his company on the shores of the lake till August, when Shelley, recalled by a letter from his solicitor, once more returned to England. The autumn and winter of the year spent by the poet, Mary Godwin, and Jane Clairmont at Bath, produced two tragedies in the Godwin and Shelley families—the suicide first of Fanny Imlay at Swansea, and afterwards of Harriet Shelley, who drowned herself in the Serpentine. On receiving intelligence of the latter event Shelley's first impulse was immediately to marry Mary Godwin, his next to obtain possession of his children by his former wife. The ceremony of marriage was completed on the 30th December 1816; but the children were withheld from him by Harriet's father and sister, who had taken charge of them after Shelley's separation from his wife. They now pleaded that the author of *Queen Mab* and the disciple of Godwin, who had put the theories of the latter into practice, was not a person qualified to be entrusted with the education of his children. A lawsuit in Chancery followed, which was closed on the 27th March 1818, by Lord Eldon's decision that the children could not be delivered over to

their father for education. While the suit was pending or proceeding, Shelley took a house in Great Marlow, and here, during the summer of 1817, he wrote *The Revolt of Islam* (or as it was at first called *Laon and Cythna*), which was published in December, at Shelley's expense, by Ollier, after the poet had been persuaded to alter certain passages which the printer feared might expose him to the risk of a prosecution.

Shelley's poetical career up to this point offers at once a singular parallel and a striking contrast to that of Wordsworth. Wordsworth, like Shelley, had at first shaped his imagination by a fervent enthusiasm for the principles of the French Revolution. But as experience showed him that the course of that Revolution was proceeding in a direction quite contrary to his own ideas, he gradually retired from all active participation in affairs, and worked out his own conceptions in solitary meditation among his native mountains. Shelley, on the other hand, never ceased from his efforts to translate his ideas into some form of external action. He rushed headlong against the historic institutions or conventions of society, and when he found his dreams of action demolished, set to work immediately to build new ideal fabrics. *The Revolt of Islam* was his poetical challenge to the practical procedure of the Court of Chancery. But money difficulties, ill-health, and dejection, caused him to turn his thoughts away from England, and on the 11th March 1818 he was on his way to Italy. Like Byron, he never returned to his native country, and, removed as he was from all possibility of active warfare with things at home, the incidents of his life abroad may be more briefly recorded, mainly in connection with his writings.

The first residence of any length by the Shelleys in Italy was at the Baths of Lucca, where they took a house from the beginning of June till the end of August Shelley himself, however, driven by his perpetual restlessness, and stimulated by the desire of Jane Clairmont to see her infant daughter Allegra, who was under the care of her father, Byron, left his wife on the 11th of August

and travelled with Jane through Florence to Venice, where he had the interview with Byron that is poetically recorded in *Julian and Maddalo.* This poem was written in a villa at Este, which Byron had rented and now offered as a residence to the Shelleys. There too were composed the "Lines written among the Euganean Hills," and the first act of *Prometheus Unbound.* Leaving Este at the end of October, the travellers passed through Ferrara and Bologna to Rome, and thence (as they intended to return) after about a week's visit to Naples, where they stayed for about three months, and where Shelley wrote his verses called "Stanzas written in Dejection." On the last day of February 1819 they were again on the way to Rome. On this occasion they remained there for three months, during which time the composition of *Prometheus Unbound* was completed in the Baths of Caracalla.

At Rome, on 7th June, William, Shelley's son by Mary Godwin, died, and was buried in the English cemetery. On the 10th of the month the party left Rome to take up their abode in Leghorn till the end of September, while the poet finished *The Cenci,* which he had begun at Rome in May. From Leghorn a move was made to Florence. Shelley's imagination was at this time greatly excited by the news of political events in England. The so-called "Massacre of Peterloo" caused him to believe in the coming of a period resembling affairs in France after 1789. "These," he wrote to Peacock on the 9th of September, "are, as it were, the distant thunders of the terrible storm which is approaching. The tyrants here, as in the French Revolution, have first shed blood. May their execrable lessons not be learnt with equal docility!"[1] Inspired by the event, he wrote his *Songs and Poems for the Men of England* and *The Masque of Anarchy*, the latter of which he endeavoured vainly to get Leigh Hunt to publish in *The Examiner.* He also wrote in prose a *Philosophical View of Reform*, and asked Hunt to find a publisher for the pamphlet; but, if the latter ever made an attempt to do so, his endeavours were

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii. p. 285.

in vain In ridicule of Wordsworth's *Peter Bell*, which had been published earlier in the year, Shelley wrote *Peter Bell the Third.* But while his mind was thus active, his bodily health suffered from the very severe winter in Florence, and in the middle of January 1820 the party suddenly resolved to leave that city for Pisa.

Pisa continued to be Shelley's headquarters almost up to the close of his life. He migrated for about six weeks to Leghorn, to be near his friends the Gisbornes, but at the beginning of August 1820 he moved thence to the Baths of St. Giuliano, a place about four miles distant from Pisa, where he stayed till late in October, when a flood compelled him to return to the city. His imagination through the year was much occupied with political events in Europe. In March the proclamation of the Spanish Constitution inspired him with the *Ode to Liberty*: the Revolution at Naples in July produced the *Ode to Naples.* The trial of Queen Caroline in England suggested to him the drama of *Œdipus Tyrannus; or Swellfoot the Tyrant*, which was published in London, but was almost immediately suppressed. At the same time the more purely literary and metaphysical side of his genius was also active. At Pisa he translated the Homeric *Hymn to Mercury*; while an excursion to Monte San Pellegrino stirred him to give expression to the mystical ideas of Nature suggested to him by the study of Spinoza; the poetical result being *The Witch of Atlas* .

At Pisa in the spring of 1821 Shelley fell platonically in love with Emilia Viviani, a girl of noble Italian birth, who, against her will, had been confined in a convent; and under the inspiration of this feeling he wrote *Epipsychidion*, a poem of which he himself said about a year later in a letter to Mr. Gisborne that he "could not look at it," recognising that its immediate motive was a delusion as complete as that which he had experienced in the case of Miss Hitchener. He continues:

If you are curious, however, to hear what I am and have been, it will tell you something thereof. It is an idealized history of my life and feelings I think one is always in love with something

or other; the error—and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it—consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal.[1]

About the same time Shelley wrote, in prose, as an answer to Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry*, his *Defence of Poetry*, which was not printed till after his death. In March of this year he had received intelligence of the death of Keats, which he attributed to the article on that poet in *The Quarterly Review*; and on 5th June he finished, at the Baths of St. Giuliano, his elegy, *Adonais*. In August he received a letter from Byron inviting him to Ravenna, where the latter was still living in the Guiccioli Palace. Shelley accepted the invitation, intending to make use of the opportunity to persuade Byron, if he could, to allow Jane Clairmont to see her daughter Allegra, whom her father had placed for education in a convent at Bagnacavallo in the Romagna. At Ravenna was completed the plan for starting *The Liberal*, a periodical to be owned and managed by Byron, Shelley, and Leigh Hunt, in which each of the partners should publish all their original compositions; and in view of this enterprise Shelley now invited Leigh Hunt to migrate from England to Italy. Stimulated by the war which had broken out between Turkey and her insurgent Greek subjects, he also wrote his *Hellas*, dedicating it to his friend Prince Mavrocordato. Without being strongly attracted to Byron by friendship, he was at this time much under the domination of his genius. He listened with the greatest admiration to the third, fourth, and fifth cantos of *Don Juan*, and did his best to carry out Byron's wish to settle himself at Pisa, where he took for him the Lanfranchi Palace on the Lung 'Arno.

From November 1821 till April 1822 the two poets were in close companionship at Pisa; but Shelley's feelings were more and more alienated from Byron on account of the behaviour of the latter, who prevented Jane Clairmont from seeing her daughter, while at the same time he insisted on keeping the child at the un-

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii. p. 381.

healthily situated convent of Bagnacavallo. Allegra died at this place early in April; and Shelley, while he concealed the fact from the mother, whom he had invited to stay with him at Pisa, felt the necessity of removing her with all speed from the neighbourhood of Byron. He accordingly impetuously pressed on negotiations which were already on foot for taking an unfurnished house at Spezzia. Thither he came with his family, Jane Clairmont, and his friends the Williams, on 1st May, and on the 2nd Jane was made acquainted with the loss of her child. On the 19th June Shelley heard from Leigh Hunt of the arrival of himself and his family at Genoa; on 1st July Hunt informed him of his departure for Leghorn and Pisa. At the same time news arrived of Byron's intended departure from Pisa, and Shelley at once set off for that city in order, if possible, to make provision for the Hunts under the altered circumstances. Sailing with Williams in a small schooner which the two friends had ordered for cruises on the coast, he arrived safely at Leghorn, and by 7th July had come to an arrangement with Byron as to Hunt's affairs. On the 8th he sailed with Williams for Spezzia, but they had not long left the harbour of Leghorn when they were caught in a violent storm, and for several days no tidings came of their vessel. On the 17th and 18th of July, however, two bodies were washed ashore, which proved to be those of Shelley and Williams. In the pockets of the former were found a volume of Sophocles and the last Poems of Keats, which Hunt had lent Shelley on parting from him at Pisa. The bodies having been lightly buried in the sands, in order to avoid legal difficulties arising out of the quarantine laws of the district, were burned on the 15th and 16th of August; and the casket containing Shelley's ashes was placed in a coffin and buried in the English cemetery at Rome on the 7th December 1822.

To separate criticism of the poetry of Shelley from a judgment of his temper and opinions is impossible.

"I have," says he in his Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*,

"what a Scotch philosopher characteristically calls 'a passion for reforming the world.' . . . For my part I had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon, than go to heaven with Paley and Malthus. But it is a mistake to suppose that I dedicate my poetical compositions solely to the direct enforcement of reform, or that I consider them in any degree as containing a reasoned system on the theory of human life. Didactic poetry is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse. My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that until the mind can love and admire and trust and hope and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life, which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness. Should I live to accomplish what I purpose, that is, produce a systematical history of what appear to me to be the genuine elements of human society, let not the advocates of injustice and superstition flatter themselves that I should take Æschylus rather than Plato as my model."

In all this there seems to be much self-deception. Shelley no doubt regarded with abhorrence reasoned didactic verse of the type of *Religio Laici* or the *Essay on Man*. Nevertheless, *Queen Mab*, *The Revolt of Islam*, (*Prometheus Unbound*, and in fact every one of his more considerable compositions, are based upon an intellectual preconception of Nature and Society which had penetrated his imagination and coloured all his thought. That system was not the speculation of Plato, but the abstract philosophy of William Godwin. The essence of Godwin's creed was that, in the Europe of his day, whatever was was wrong, and that society required to be reconstituted on abstract principles.)

"It is now twelve years," says he in the preface to his *Political Justice*, "that he (*i.e.* the author) became satisfied that monarchy was a species of government unavoidably corrupt. He owed this conviction to the political writings of Swift and to a perusal of the Latin historians. Nearly at the same time he derived great additional instruction from reading the most considerable French writers upon the nature of man in the following order, *Système de la Nature*, Rousseau, and Helvetius."

However Shelley in his later days may have modified his admiration of the French philosophers, there can be no doubt that their principles, through the medium of Godwin, were the inspiring source of his poetical genius. Acting on a spirit all made up of fire and imagination, untempered by the colder elements of reason and judgment, the idea of Man, Nature, and Society raised by these writers was for ever conflicting with the experience of the existing order of things, inspiring the poetical genius to create visionary worlds, and plunging the soaring spirit, when its aerial fabrics collapsed, into gulfs of despondency.

Shelley's flaming fancy could find no adequate vehicle for its energies in any of the forms of poetry established by the usage of the classical poets. He employed as his instruments of expression, the epic, the drama, and the elegy; but (with perhaps the single exception of *The Cenci*) in no single composition does he attempt the representation of action, passion, and character, or appeal to the emotions of pity and terror, on the lines followed by such poets as Æschylus, Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton. In all his work the lyrical mood predominates so enormously over the creative as to confuse the clear outlines of poetical structure; and, as in the case of Byron, the reader is always obliged to view the object put before his imagination through the coloured medium of the writer's personality.

The germs of Shelley's constant poetical practice may be traced in his earliest poem, *Queen Mab.* The subject of this composition is quite intelligible, viz. the revelation of the universe to a disembodied spirit. The machinery for the execution of the idea is of the simplest kind. Mab, the Fairy, is supposed to carry the spirit in her car to a point from which it can view the whole external order of Nature, of which the poem is made to give an account. In a structure marked by so little poetical invention it is obvious that the attention of the reader can be arrested only by the anti-religious character of the opinions expressed The descriptions

are commonplace, and if it were not for the defiance of accepted beliefs, the following passage, setting forth the relations between kings and their subjects, and based on Godwin's anti-monarchical principles, would be noticeable simply for the crudity of its rhetorical platitudes:

> Is it strange
> That this poor wretch should pride him in his woe?
> Take pleasure in his abjectness, and hug
> The scorpion that consumes him? Is it strange
> That, placed on a conspicuous throne of thorns,
> Grasping an iron sceptre, and immured
> Within a splendid prison, whose stern bounds
> Shut him from all that's good or dear on earth,
> His soul asserts not its humanity?
> That man's mild nature rises not in war
> Against a king's employ? No—'tis not strange,
> He, like the vulgar, thinks, feels, acts, and lives,
> Just as his father did; the unconquered powers
> Of precedent and custom interpose
> Between a *king* and virtue. Stranger yet,
> To those who know not nature, nor deduce
> The future from the present, it may seem,
> That not one slave, who suffers from the crimes
> Of this unnatural being; not one wretch,
> Whose children famish, and whose nuptial bed
> Is earth's unpitying bosom, rears an arm
> To dash him from his throne!

Alastor; or the Spirit of Solitude ranks far higher than *Queen Mab* as a poetical composition; yet this too, though, in a sense, a narrative poem, is in its conception purely lyrical. Written at Bishopsgate, after a ten-days' rowing expedition on the Thames, it embodies a feeling of despondency—resulting from the disappointment of high-wrought idealism, of disenchantment after visionary dreams of love, and the overthrow of equally unsubstantial political schemes—in images inspired by memories of lonely landscapes in the Alps, and the pastoral scenery of an English river. The unresting idealism by which Shelley continued to be driven, as by the gad-fly of Io, down to the day of his death, is indicated in his choice of a motto from the *Confessions of St. Augustine*—"Nondum amabam, et amare amabam,

quaerebam quid amarem, amans amare"—and in the extremely beautiful opening address, where the poet himself appeals to the influences of Nature. All this gives to *Alastor* the unmistakable stamp of the writer's character; but when we look to the external structure, or form, of the poem through which he communicates his thought to his readers, we become conscious of artistic vagueness and debility. A poet (obviously a representation of the author, painted by himself), seeking ever in vain for the permanent object of his affections, sees in a dream her image, and on waking pursues it over the face of the earth. He embarks on the ocean in an unseaworthy boat, and is carried by the winds and waves into a cavern, through which his vessel follows the course of a subterranean river to the brink of a whirlpool, (seemingly a symbol of Death), where it is turned into a side stream, and follows the windings of a tributary rivulet, till the navigator comes to a "silent nook" in which

He knew
That death was on him;

the gradual fading of the external world from his dying eyes being strikingly described. The conclusion of the poem seems intended to show at once the impossibility of finding any stable object of love for the poetic imagination, and the loss suffered by the world when such an imagination vanishes from it.

O for Medea's wondrous alchymy,
Which, wheresoe'er it fell, made the earth gleam
With bright flowers and the wintry boughs exhale
From vernal blooms fresh fragrance! O that God,
Profuse of poisons, would concede the chalice
Which but one living man has drained, who now,
Vessel of deathless wrath, a slave that feels
No proud exemption in the blighting curse
He bears, over the world wanders for ever,
Lone as incarnate death! O that the dream
Of dark magician in his visionèd cave,
Raking the cinders of a crucible
For life and power, even when his feeble hand
Shakes in its last decay, were the true law

Of this so lovely world! But thou art fled
Like some frail exhalation, which the dawn
Robes in its golden beams,—ah, thou hast fled!
The brave, the gentle, and the beautiful,
The child of grace and genius. Heartless things
Are done and said i' the world, and many worms
And beasts and men live on, and mighty Earth
From sea and mountain, city and wilderness,
In vesper low or joyous orison,
Lifts still its solemn voice:—but thou art fled—
Thou canst no longer know or love the shapes
Of this phantasmal scene, who have to thee
Been purest ministers, who are, alas!
Now thou art not. Upon those pallid lips
So sweet even in their silence, on those eyes
That image sleep in death, upon that form
Yet safe from the worm's outrage, let no tear
Be shed—not even in thought. Nor when those hues
Are gone, and those divinest lineaments,
Worn by the senseless wind, shall live alone
In the frail pauses of this simple strain,
Let not high verse, mourning the memory
Of that which is no more, or painting's woe,
Or sculpture, speak in feeble imagery
Their own cold powers. Art and eloquence,
And all the shows of the world, are frail and vain
To weep a loss that turns their light to shade.
It is a woe "too deep for tears," when all
Is reft at once, when some surpassing Spirit,
Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves
Those who remain behind nor sobs nor groans,
The passionate tumult of a clinging hope;
But pale despair and cold tranquillity,
Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,
Birth and the grave, that are not as they were.

"The poem," Shelley tells us in his Preface, "is not barren of instruction to actual men. The Poet's self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin." It might be supposed then that this was the moral of the poem. Not so! The poet's pursuit of the unattainable ideal was at least preferable to the principles of those who busy themselves with the limited interests of life and action. Shelley seems to reckon as nothing the fact that, if the world in general were to pursue "the shapes of

this phantasmal scene," human society and sympathy could not exist. Nor does he take thought of the complementary fact that neither Dante nor Shakespeare, any more than the great poets of Greece and Rome, held this pursuit to be the true aim of poetry, all of them tacitly admitting that part of their art consisted in making concessions to the "common sense" of their audience. The world is not bound to acquaint itself with the postulates of any particular poet, and however unsympathetic was the criticism of *Alastor* by *The Monthly Review*, however blind to the beauties of the work in detail, it can scarcely be called unreasonable:

> We must candidly own that these poems are beyond our comprehension; and we did not obtain a clue to their sublime obscurity, till an address to Mr. Wordsworth explained in what school the author had formed his taste. . . . We entreat him for the sake of his reviewers, as well as of his other readers (if he has any), to subjoin to his next publication an *ordo*, a glossary and copious notes, illustrative of his allusions and explanatory of his meaning.[1]

It need hardly be said that Shelley did not act upon this advice. The characteristic features of *Alastor* stand out with even more prominence in *The Revolt of Islam*, because the epic character of that work is more pronounced. The poet gave, however, in his Preface an account of his intentions, which is full of interest. He begins with sounding loudly the note of Godwinism:

> The Poem is an experiment on the temper of the public mind, as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives, among the enlightened and refined, the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live. I have sought to enlist the harmony of metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a Poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality; and in the view of kindling within the bosoms of my readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol ii p 59

violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind.

It is evident from this, taken in connection with the general character of the poem, that in Shelley's mind the political history of England counted for nothing; and that for him the long struggle of this country with Napoleon, in defence of the principle of national independence in Europe, meant simply a war on behalf of monarchical despotism against the cause of "liberty and justice." Dazzled by the atmosphere of his idealism, he was unable to distinguish the shape and proportion of actual objects, and his illusions prevented him equally from understanding the qualities which the imagination of men, as generally constituted, requires in the conduct of a long narrative poem. His Preface shows how "the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a Poem," are intended to be cast into an artistic whole in *The Revolt of Islam.*

The Poem (with the exception of the first canto, which is purely introductory) is narrative, not didactic. It is a succession of pictures illustrating the growth and progress of an individual mind aspiring after excellence and devoted to the love of mankind; its influence in refining and making pure the most daring and uncommon impulses of the imagination, the understanding, and the senses; its impatience at "all the oppressions which are done under the sun"; its tendency to awaken public hope and to enlighten and improve mankind; the rapid effects of the application of that tendency; the awakening of an immense nation from their slavery to a true sense of moral dignity and freedom; the bloodless dethronement of their oppressors, and the unveiling of the religious frauds by which they had been deluded into submission; the tranquillity of successful patriotism, and the universal toleration and benevolence of true philanthropy; the treachery and barbarity of hired soldiers; vice not the object of punishment and hatred, but kindness and pity; the faithlessness of tyrants; the confederacy of the Rulers of the World, and the restoration of the expelled dynasty by foreign arms; the massacre and extermination of the Patriots, and the victory of established power; the consequences of legitimate despotism,—civil war, famine, plague, superstition, and an utter extinction of

the domestic affections; the judicial murder of the advocates of Liberty; the temporary triumph of oppression, that secure earnest of its final and inevitable fall; the transient nature of ignorance and error, and the eternity of genius and virtue.

Even granting that it was possible to treat of all these abstract ideas in narrative poetry, it is plain that the feat could only be accomplished through concrete images arranged in an intelligible order, and that (as Tasso had long before shown in his treatise on the requirements of epic poetry[1]) some concessions had to be made to the legitimate expectations of the reader. But for reasoning like this Shelley made no allowance:

"If," says he, "the lofty passions with which it has been my scope to distinguish this story shall not excite in the reader a generous impulse, an ardent thirst for excellence, an interest profound and strong, such as belongs to no meaner desires—let not the failure be imputed to a natural unfitness for human sympathy in these sublime and animating themes. It is the business of the Poet to communicate to others the pleasure and the enthusiasm arising out of those images and feelings, in the vivid presence of which *within his own mind* consists at once his inspiration and his reward."

Certainly it is. But it is also the epic or dramatic poet's business to produce this moral effect by satisfying what Aristotle calls the general idea of "the probable," with reference to action, passion, character, and description.

To expect that "virtuous enthusiasm for the doctrines of liberty and justice" could be kindled by a narrative poem of twelve cantos full of fictitious incidents conceived after the manner of those in *Zastrozzi*, showed a complete ignorance of the requirements of the reader's imagination, an element in art which no poet can afford to leave out of his account The same sanguine improvidence is displayed by Shelley in his dramas, two of which—*Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*—have their foundation in Godwinian axioms, while the third, *The Cenci*, though cast in a more conventional mould, ignores so completely the temper of a theatrical audience, that it can hardly be said to conform to the canons of dramatic art.

[1] See vol v. pp 7 8

Prometheus Unbound is professedly a continuation of the *Prometheus Vinctus* of Aeschylus; "but," says Shelley, "I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind. The moral interest of the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary." Nevertheless, it seems clear enough that the task which Aeschylus, as a dramatist, undertook was to put into a form suited for theatrical representation the incidents of an historic legend with which his audience were perfectly familiar. He would never have thought of altering the facts, as recorded, for his own philosophical purposes. No doubt the story suggested all kinds of interesting speculative problems; but the Aeschylean Prometheus is far from being the mere suffering philanthropist and rebel who appears in the drama of Shelley, and who is indeed the reflection of Shelley himself. The leading quality of the Greek Prometheus is his foresight, in which he is superior to Zeus; but, though he knows the future, he cannot control it: his desire is to square events to the law of Necessity: in the civil war of the Gods he would have sided with the Titans, but when he found that they hoped to prevail by blind force, he showed Zeus the way to make himself supreme by art and cunning. It is disgust at Zeus's ingratitude and brutal tyranny that makes Prometheus rebel against the dominion of which he foresees the end. In what way a dramatic situation would have been contrived out of his release by Hercules we find it difficult to imagine; but it is at least plain that, in the *Prometheus Vinctus*, the moral interest of the situation is brought out by a simple dramatic evolution of supposed facts.

In Shelley's poem, on the contrary, everything is ranged round the central idea of rebellion against constituted authority: the second act is without movement, but the idea of Promethean philanthropy, as viewed by

the English poet, is set forth in a long speech of Asia travestying Aeschylus's straightforward narrative of the Titan's dealings with the human race:[1] in the third act, Zeus is dethroned in mystic fashion by Demogorgon, while Prometheus is released by Hercules, who makes his appearance in the drama solely for the purpose of this deliverance: the fourth and last act is entirely lyrical. The action of the drama, in short, counts for nothing: ideas—that is to say, the poet's preconceived speculative ideas—are everything.

As *Prometheus Unbound* was suggested by the *Prometheus Vinctus* of Aeschylus, so the framework of *Hellas* is, in outline at least, to be traced in the *Persae*. Shelley's drama is, like that of Aeschylus, without direct action, and many of its leading features are copied immediately from the Greek. It opens with a chorus: there is an interpretation of dreams; a description of battles through the mouth of messengers, and a Ghost or Phantom. But no two plays can be more unlike each other in all the essentials of character. In the work of Aeschylus everything is directed to a definite end, with a view to arouse certain intelligible and readily anticipated emotions in the imagination of the audience. The religious moral is clearly indicated in the reflections of the Chorus: though the speakers are Persian, the feelings appealed to are those of the Greek spectators in the theatre; the actions reported by means of the *dramatis personae* are accurately historical; indeed the whole structure of the play is characterised by a certain *naïveté*, marking the transition from the epic to the dramatic style. In *Hellas*, on the contrary, all these clearly-cut dramatic outlines melt into an atmosphere of mysticism: Shelley's favourite figure of the Wandering Jew[2] is introduced into the machinery of the poem: the reported battles are as purely imaginary, and their supposed details as marvellous as those invented in the *Pharsalia*, by the ingenuity of

[1] Compare with the speech of Asia (Act II. Sc. 4), Prometheus's speeches in lines 444-514 of *Prometheus Vinctus*

[2] Already introduced into *Queen Mab*.

Lucan. Shelley's motives, in short, were, as he himself says, exclusively lyrical:

The poem of *Hellas*, written at the suggestion of the events of the moment, is a mere improvise, and derives its interest (should it be found to possess any) solely from the intense sympathy which the Author feels with the cause he would celebrate.

In *The Cenci* the case is somewhat different. Unlike the other "dramas" of Shelley, this play was intended by its author for the stage: he thought that the part of Beatrice might suit Miss MacNeill, the popular tragic actress of the day. His conception of the design is described in the preface to the tragedy:

The story of the Cenci is indeed eminently fearful and monstrous: anything like a dry exhibition of it on the stage would be insupportable. The person who would treat such a subject must increase the ideal and diminish the actual horror of the events, so that the pleasure which arises from the poetry which exists in these tempestuous sufferings and crimes may mitigate the pain of the contemplation of the moral deformity from which they spring. There must also be nothing attempted to make the exhibition subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose. The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama is the teaching of the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant, and kind. If dogmas can do more, it is well: but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them. Undoubtedly no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner, she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character: the few whom such an exhibition would have interested, could never have been sufficiently interested for a dramatic purpose, from the want of finding sympathy in their interest among the mass who surround them. It is in the restless and anatomising casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and their revenge, that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered consists.

Had Shelley possessed any knowledge of the working of human passions, he would have known that no audience—at least no English audience—would ever have tolerated on the stage the representation of "casuistry" like what he imagines. But assuming that such a spectacular exhibition were possible, *The Cenci* shows that he was not able to carry out his own idea with dramatic consistency. The interest of his drama is concentrated in the character of Beatrice. If parricide were in her case justifiable, it was dramatically necessary that she should boldly avow her act. Instead of doing so, she first hires assassins to murder her father, incites them when she finds them hesitating, and rewards them after the deed is done; but, as soon as she is confronted with the officers of justice, she disavows her instruments, and uses all the artifices of rhetoric to persuade her judges how improbable was the story that she could have "planned the crime alleged"! Although she knows that he knows that every word she utters is a lie, she makes in court such an impressive appeal to the vulgar murderer whom she has hired, that she induces him to withdraw his confession of the true facts, and he allows himself to be broken on the wheel in proof of her innocence!

The essence of ancient poetry lay in imitation; in other words, poetry was an ideal representation of life and action, viewed through the general spiritual atmosphere pervading society, and expressed metrically by means of certain forms determined by artistic experience. On this principle, the view of nature formed by the individual poet was no doubt constantly modified by external forces, but substantially it was identical—in so far as it was artistically correct—with that of his audience. Dante's idea of the Universe was not peculiar to himself, but was authorised by the prevailing Scholastic Philosophy, Shakespeare's view of life was the Christian religion, seen through the patriotic and monarchical enthusiasm of Elizabethan England; Milton's central conception in *Paradise Lost* was the Catholic faith, modified by the Republican and Puritan influences springing out of the Reformation.

Shelley shows, over and over again, in his prefaces that he understood this principle, and that he was aware of a common atmosphere acting upon himself and his contemporaries. He lived in an age of Revolution, and the French Revolution was bound to affect profoundly the form of English poetry. But to Shelley, Revolution meant such a complete overthrow of all established ideas, that he made no allowance in his art for the growth of nineteen centuries of Christian and feudal thought. With him the world began again in the philosophy of Godwin and the French materialistic philosophers; and if this fundamental idea of Nature was afterwards somewhat modified by the study of Plato and Spinoza, it left no room in his imagination for any conception of Society based on historic evolution.

It is evident, *prima facie*, that no known form of epic or drama could be employed as the vehicle for ideas so conceived. Whatever metrical mould was to be used as a means of communication between Shelley and his readers had, from the artistic point of view, to be solely lyrical. Even the lyrical form was unavailable, so far as the matter involved the representation of external objects in a clearly defined metrical structure. Compare, for example, Collins' *Ode to Liberty* with that of Shelley on the same subject. The former employs the Greek form of strophe, antistrophe, and epode; and his view of the progress of Constitutional Freedom, though not marked by profound thought, is clear, simple, and well proportioned. Shelley's subject was professedly the proclamation of the Constitution in Spain in 1820, an incident which has certainly not made any deep impression on the course of history, and in order to celebrate this, he expanded his thought into nineteen strophes of fifteen lines each. He describes the chaotic state of Nature and Society before the appearance of Liberty—showing how, in some stage of human life (unknown, it need hardly be said, to history), everything lay at the mercy of Anarchy, Tyranny, and Priesthood. Then Athens arose, and devised Art and Order: afterwards came Rome, under whose republican rule "saintly

Camillus lived and firm Atilius died." But under the despotism of the Roman Empire Christianity made its appearance, and, up to the time of the French Revolution, enslaved mankind. England yet slept; but she should awake at the call of Spain; and the period is prayed for when Christianity shall be no more:

> O that the free would stamp the impious name
> Of * * * * into the dust or write it there,
> So that this blot upon the page of fame
> Were as the serpent's path which the light air
> Erases, and the flat sands close behind!

And yet, when Liberty has destroyed all forms of established authority and external faith; when the spirit of Man is left, in a void Universe, free from all power superior to itself,—what does the poet find remaining but mere negation? The Ode ends in feelings of deep despondency, clothed in magnificent imagery:

> The spirit of that mighty singing
> To its abyss was suddenly withdrawn;
> Then as a wild swan, when sublimely winging
> Its path athwart the thunder-smoke of dawn,
> Sinks headlong through the aerial golden light
> On the heavy sounding plain,
> When the bolt has pierced its brain;
> As summer clouds dissolve unburthened of their rain;
> As a far taper fades with fading night,
> As a brief insect dies with dying day,
> My song, its pinions disarrayed of might,
> Drooped; o'er it closed the echoes far away
> Of the great voice which did its flight sustain,
> As waves, which lately paved his watery way,
> Hiss round a drowner's head in their tempestuous play.

In spite of its structural defects, Shelley's *Ode to Liberty* affords an admirable specimen of his poetical qualities, and suggests the reasons for the essential differences between his genius and that of the poets who wrote upon classical principles Shelley is the most brilliant representative of the romantic school of poetry as described in the definition of Wordsworth:

> He (the poet) is a man speaking to men; a man it is true endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and

tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.[1]

No words can more fittingly portray the temper and poetical methods of the author of *Alastor.* With a spiritual gaze turned first inward, on his own passions and volitions, and then outward upon the Universe, he looked in vain for external objects answering to the forms generated by his dazzling imagination; and he was perpetually forced to allow the baselessness of his visions of Immortality. As he says in a striking sonnet:

Ye hasten to the grave! What seek ye there,
Ye restless thoughts and busy purposes
Of the idle brain, which the world's livery wear?
O thou quick Heart, which pantest to possess
All that anticipation feigneth fair!
Thou vainly curious Mind, which wouldest guess
Whence thou didst come, and whither thou mayest go,
And that which never yet was known wouldst know—
Oh, whither hasten ye, that thus ye press
With such swift feet life's green and pleasant path,
Seeking alike from happiness and woe
A refuge in the cavern of grey death?
O heart, and mind, and thoughts! What thing do you
Hope to inherit in the grave below?

In the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* he seems for a moment to cherish a belief in some unchanging Spirit of Beauty; but the study of Spinoza rather led him to imagine an unseen Life of the Universe, eternal but ever changing; and for this conception he perpetually sought external forms of expression. No poet, ancient or modern, has equalled Shelley in the power of accumulating successions of sublime images in flowing verse: no poet has ever exhibited such inexhaustible resources in finding words metrically suited to the subtle and intricate

[1] Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800.

windings of spiritual thought. His poetry seems to be a reflection of his own idea of Nature as imaged in the lines of his *Adonais*:

> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until Death tramples it to fragments.

As far as it was possible for such a kaleidoscopic view of things to assume a formal shape the result is embodied in *Alastor* and *Prometheus Unbound*, poems in which the Fancy wanders vaguely through an ideal world, where images, resembling on a gigantic scale natural objects, —mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, and caverns—appear for a moment with outlines as clear as Alpine peaks in sunlight, and then dissolve, or vanish in seas of rising vapour. In the midst of this ideal landscape the voice of the poet cries unrestingly for the Infinite:

> I can give not what men call love,
> But wilt thou accept not
> The worship the heart lifts above
> And the Heavens reject not:
> The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow,
> The devotion to something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow?

Sometimes the human spirit seems to merge itself in the movement of the invisible forces of Nature, as in the beautiful *Ode to the West Wind*:

> If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
> If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
> A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share
>
> The impulse of thy strength, only less free
> Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
> I were as in my boyhood, and could be
>
> The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,
> As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
> Scarce seemed a vision, I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

Once the unsatisfied imagination of the poet discovered an external object which seemed exactly to typify the nature of its own emotion, and grouped around it a multitude of images with an absolute perfection of art. I need hardly say that I refer to the divine lines *To a Skylark.* Generally speaking, Shelley seems to find the repose which art in poetry requires, rather in the images of Greek mythology than in any object of modern contemplation. In the beautiful little poem *Arethusa* the mythopöetic power of personifying the movements of Nature is exhibited in unrivalled perfection: there is an enchanting melody in the *Hymn of Pan,* written for an intended drama on the subject of Midas; and in the Translation of the Homeric *Hymn to Mercury* the ease and playfulness of the style breathe all the free spirit of Greek polytheism. But the Greek genius shrank from the contemplation of the Infinite; Greek art loved to clothe itself in clear and definite forms: all therefore that Shelley's poetry has in common with the Greek is the power of abstracting ideas from natural objects and embodying them in brilliant images. The Platonic philosophy is clearly discoverable as the source of the fluent melody in the following passage from *Epipsychidion*:

Spouse! Sister! Angel! Pilot of the Fate
Whose course has been so starless! O too late
Beloved! O too soon adored, by me!
For in the fields of Immortality
My spirit should at first have worshipped thine,
A divine presence in a place divine;
Or should have moved beside it on this earth,
A shadow of that substance, from its birth;
And not as now: I love thee; yes, I feel
That on the fountain of my heart a seal
Is set, to keep its waters pure and bright
For thee, since in those *tears* thou hast delight.

> We—are we not formed, as notes of music are,
> For one another though dissimilar;
> Such difference without discord as can make
> Those sweetest sounds, in which all spirits shake,
> As trembling leaves in a continuous air?

But judgment and artistic good sense would have prevented any Greek poet, even in the days of the *Anthology*, from expressing himself in terms of gushing enthusiasm about an external object of which, within a year, Shelley could write as follows:

> The *Epipsychidion* I cannot look at; the person whom it celebrates was a cloud instead of a Juno; and poor Ixion starts from the centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace.[1]

These words may be taken as an epigrammatic summary of the character of almost all this poet's work. The most brilliant spiritual imagination that ever appeared in English poetry was for ever embracing "a cloud instead of a Juno", and his most truly artistic, as well as his most pathetic, compositions are those embodying the feelings of despondency in which "poor Ixion starts from the centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace." Herein lies the difference between Shelley's idealism and that of two great poets with whom in many respects his genius seems to have much affinity, Dante and Spenser. To Dante he is constantly referring he uses the *terza rima* more frequently than any other English poet; and in one of his latest compositions—left unfinished, rough, and obscure—he takes the general conception and even the phraseology of the Florentine poet as his model The *Triumph of Life* is, like the *Divine Comedy*, a vision of humanity, interpreted by means of allegorical symbols, but whereas the character of the mediæval poem exhibits itself in dogmatic clearness, strength, and symmetry, the keynote of Shelley's thought is uncertainty and confusion As Virgil explains to Dante the meaning of the various scenes in the *Inferno*, so Rousseau interprets for Shelley the significance of the visionary pageant that passes before his imagination; but while the system of

[1] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol ii p 381

rewards and punishments in the *Divine Comedy* is regulated by a Divine moral law, the conclusion in Shelley's poem seems to be that Life triumphs over everything by mere movement: love itself, with each individual thing, is crushed beneath her car, like that of Juggernath. According to Rousseau:

In the battle life and they did wage,
She remained conqueror. I was overcome
By my own heart alone, which neither age

Nor tears, nor infamy, nor now the tomb
Could temper to its object. "Let them pass,"
I cried; "the world and its mysterious doom

Is not so much more glorious than it was,
That I desire to worship those who drew
New figures on its false and fragile glass

As the old faded."—"Figures ever new
Rise on the bubble, paint them as you may;
We have but thrown, as those before us threw,

Our shadows on it as it past away."

So again there is much of common kindred in the lofty, chivalrous, and purely intellectual aspirations of Spenser and Shelley: as in Shelley, so in Spenser, there was a spirit always seeking for some external object conformable to its own ideal, and always failing to discover it. Shelley would have sympathised deeply with the mood in which Spenser wrote the following stanza:

So oft as I with state of present time
The image of the antique world compare,
When as man's age was in his freshest prime
And the first blossome of faire virtue bare;
Such odds I finde twixt those and these which are,
As that, through long continuance of his course
Me seemes the world is runne quite out of square
From the first point of his appointed source,
And being once amisse grows daily worse and worse.

But here again Spenser's ideal, unattainable in the actual condition of things, was at least readily intelligible from the point of view of life, action, and authority. To form the "noble courtier"; or, as he says himself, "to fashion

a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline," seemed no idle dream in an age which could still produce such a specimen of knighthood as Sir Philip Sidney: however remotely withdrawn into the heart of Fairyland, the figure of Gloriana was not an irrational object of worship to men still familiar with the principles of Feudal Monarchy. On the other hand, the idealism of Shelley had no basis beyond his own chivalrous and enthusiastic temper, which, Ixionlike, was always forming clouds into momentary shapes of human perfectibility round commonplace figures,—Elizabeth Hitchener, for example, and Emilia Viviani,—or into aerial visions of impossible societies, like the revolutionised Golden City, founded on the speculations of an intelligence sordidly worldly, like that of William Godwin. The enduring poetry of Shelley consists not in these evanescent fabrics, but in the lyric cries of pain, so typical of idealism in all ages, drawn from a generous and sensitive soul awaking from its illusions to the harsh realities of life. "Good, far more than evil impulses," he wrote to his second wife, "love far more than hatred, has been to me, except as you have been the object of it, the source of all sorts of mischief." And the feelings of the disenchanted spirit, expressed in poems like *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*, *Stanzas written in Dejection, near Naples*, *To a Skylark*, the *Ode to the West Wind*,—much more than the vast and vague conceptions of *The Revolt of Islam*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Hellas*—are the monuments which, as long as the English language is read, will continue to draw the affection and sympathy of men towards their amiable and most unfortunate author:

Some might lament that I were cold,
  As I when this sweet day is gone,
Which my lost heart, too soon grown old,
  Insults with this untimely moan;
They might lament—for I am one
  Whom men love not,—and yet regret,

CHAPTER X

ROMANTICISM IN ENGLISH POETRY

POETRY AND PAINTING: JOHN KEATS

THE principle of poetic introspection, inaugurated and advocated by Wordsworth, after embodying itself first in the romantic self-representation of Byron, and then in the revolutionary idealism of Shelley, found finally a mode of expression, which, though at the time it attracted comparatively little notice, has probably produced more lasting results in determining the course of modern poetry than the practice of any of the three poets just mentioned. I allude to the approximation between the arts of poetry and painting, which gives its dominant character to the work of the author of *The Eve of St. Agnes.*

John Keats was born at the Swan and Hoop Inn, Finsbury Pavement, London, on the 29th or 31st of October 1795. His father, who was hostler to Mr. Jennings, keeper of the livery stable of the inn, married his master's daughter—a step which obtained for him in time the management of the business. This prospered, and in his eighth year John was sent to a school at Enfield, kept by the Rev. John Clarke, whose son Charles, then his father's assistant, took a great interest in his pupil's progress, and did much to encourage his literary talents.

"In the early part of his school life," he tells us, "John gave no extraordinary indications of intellectual character; it was in the last eighteen months or so that he became an omnivorous reader. . . . History, voyages, and travels, formed the bulk of the

school library, and these he soon exhausted, but the books that he read with most assiduity were Tooke's *Pantheon*, Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*, which he seemed to *learn*, and Spence's *Polymetis*."[1]

Keats was removed from school at the age of fifteen, and (his father being dead and his mother having married again) was apprenticed to Mr. Hammond, a surgeon at Edmonton. With him he remained till 1814, when he came to London to study medicine. He had already had his taste for poetry confirmed by Charles Clarke, who in 1813 delighted his imagination by reading to him Spenser's *Epithalamion*. His inclination for the Elizabethan poets was strengthened by Leigh Hunt, under whose influence he came in 1816, rather more than a year after the latter had been released from the imprisonment to which he had been subjected in consequence of his libel on the Prince Regent. Keats and his friend Clarke were both admirers of Hunt's political principles; and Clarke, who was personally acquainted with the Editor of *The Examiner*, brought his old pupil's MSS. under his notice. In Hunt's paper were published, in 1816 and the early months of 1817, Keats' *Sonnet to Solitude*, that beginning *After dark Vapours*, the *Sonnet written at the end of the "Flowre and the Lefe,"* and that *To Haydon on the Elgin Marbles*. Hunt wrote an article on Reynolds, Shelley, and Keats in *The Examiner* of December 1816, and in March 1817 Keats' volume of poems appeared, with a sonnet of dedication to Hunt. In April 1817 Keats began *Endymion*, which was finished in the following November. This poem was published by Taylor and Hessey in April 1818, and was savagely reviewed in *Blackwood's Magazine* for August, and in *The Quarterly Review* for September of that year.

Though it appears that Keats was seriously annoyed by these attacks, he was certainly not affected by them in the way that Shelley supposes in *Adonais*, and Byron in *Don Juan*. Most of his best work was done between the autumn of 1818 and the winter of 1819-20, during

[1] Cowden Clarke, *Recollections of Writers*, pp. 122-4.

which period he wrote *Hyperion*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Lamia*, the Odes to *Indolence*, *Nightingale*, *Psyche*, *Melancholy*, *Autumn*, on a *Grecian Urn*, and several Sonnets. In August 1818 he had made the acquaintance of Fanny Brawne, and gradually conceived a passion for her, which absorbed his imagination, and, mixing itself with the disease that was consuming him, at last mortified his powers of composition. She seems to have been a vain and vulgar person, with some personal attractions, round which Keats' idealising fancy played like a moth about a candle, giving utterance to the agony of his emotions in such poems as the lines *To Fanny* and those beginning:

What can I do to drive away
Remembrance from my eyes?

or the Sonnets opening, "The day is gone," and "I cry your mercy." In February 1820 severe haemorrhage warned him of his approaching end. Recovering from this attack, he left Hampstead, where he had written some of his most characteristic poems, moving at first to Kentish Town, to be near Leigh Hunt, and afterwards—having suffered from a bad relapse—to the house of that poet in Mortimer Street. While he resided there, the volume containing the poems written in 1819 was published, and was favourably noticed by Hunt in *The Indicator* and by Jeffrey in *The Edinburgh Review*.[1] Keats declined an invitation from Shelley to winter with him in Italy, but feeling the necessity of escaping from the severe climate of England, he sailed with his friend Severn in September for Naples, and on the voyage, having landed at Lulworth Cove, wrote his last sonnet beginning, "Bright Star!" Reaching Naples towards the end of October, he passed thence to Rome in the middle of November, and within a month of his arrival in the city was again attacked by haemorrhage. In this state he lingered till the 23rd February 1821, when he died, and was buried in the English cemetery on the 27th of the same month.

The poetry of Keats exhibits the progressive efforts

[1] *Edinburgh Review* for August 1820.

of a man of powerful genius to create for his imagination an ideal atmosphere, unaffected by the social influences of his age, by conceiving of external Nature in the mythological spirit of pagan times, and by giving expression, in metrical words, to the ideas so conceived, in a manner resembling the art of those who imitate external objects by means of form and colour. His dominant qualities as a poet are an emotional sensibility, swayed by a voluptuous perception of beauty in natural things, and a brilliant fancy which enabled him readily to abstract ideal forms from the objects presented to his eye. Historically, the interest of his career lies in three consecutive stages, the first of which shows him gradually passing out of the mood [illegible] 'iip and the introspective [illegible] the mythological methods [illegible] the second throws light upon the manner in which the Classical Renaissance, on its purely literary side, is related to this movement of Romantic art; while the third is the period of matured artistic accomplishment, when Keats had discovered by experience the limits within which his genius could move with freedom.

1. I have endeavoured to trace the intellectual process which drew Wordsworth away from sharing in the political activities of his age into a life of solitary contemplation among his native mountains. There is an evident affinity between the philosophical scheme of Nature-worship which he there developed and the fundamental ideas of Greek religion. In *The Excursion* he uses the polytheistic mythology of the Greeks as an argument to prove the existence of an unseen spirit in Nature.[1] He even regrets in one of his sonnets his want of the mythopoetic faculty:

> Great God! I'd rather be
> A Pagan, suckled in a creed out-worn;
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn,
> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn

[1] *The Excursion*, Book iv., "The lively Grecian, etc."

But his delight in natural objects was with him only a stepping-stone towards that philosophical view of Nature which he sought finally to erect into a positive religious creed. As he says, in *The Prelude*:

My delights
(Such as they were) were sought insatiably,
Vivid the transport, vivid though not profound;
I roamed from hill to hill, from rock to rock,
Still craving combinations of new forms,
New pleasure, wider empire for the sight,
Proud of her own endowments, and rejoiced
To lay the inner faculties asleep.[1]

Keats, though educated in the Wordsworthian school of Nature-worship, desired to halt at the stage which the Lake poet pronounced unsatisfactory. In his first volume, published in 1817, the opening poem is an attempt to express the perceptions of beauty aroused in his imagination by a confused crowd of rural objects which he declares to be the true source of poetical inspiration:

For what has made the sage or poet write
But the fair paradise of Nature's light?
In the calm grandeur of a sober line
We see the waving of a mountain pine;
And when a tale is beautifully staid,
We feel the safety of a hawthorn glade:
When it is moving on luxurious wings
The soul is lost in pleasant smotherings:
Fair dewy roses brush against our faces
And flowering laurels spring from diamond vases;
O'er head we see the jasmin and sweet briar,
And bloomy grapes laughing from green attire;
While at our feet the voice of crystal bubbles
Charms us at once away from all our troubles,
So that we feel up-lifted from the world
Walking upon the white clouds wreath'd and curl'd.

Keats, like Coleridge, shrank from that austere communion with Nature by which Wordsworth vindicated the right of poetry to withdraw from participation in the active movement of life. But that which to Coleridge seemed a point of perfection unattainable by his own moral being[2] was to Keats an odious misdirection of art.

[1] *Prelude*, Book xii.

[2] See p. 188.

"We hate poetry," he writes to a friend, "that has a palpable design upon us. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul."[1] Repulsion from Wordsworth's ethical doctrines was, with him, mainly a matter of temperament: he was tortured by a disease inherent in his constitution. "O for a life," he exclaims, "of sensations rather than of thoughts!"[2] and though this aspiration was identified in his mind with the intellectual axiom that "What the Imagination seizes as Beauty, must be Truth,"[3] yet it cannot be separated from his practical illustration of "happiness" as described in the following passage:

This morning I am in a sort of temper, indolent and supremely careless I long after a stanza or two of Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*—my passions are all asleep, from my having slumbered till nearly eleven, and wakened the animal fibre all over me to a delightful sensation, about three degrees on this side of faint-ness. If I had teeth of pearl and the breath of lilies, I should call it languor, but as I am I must call it laziness. In this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement, and pain no unbearable power. Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any [illegible] of countenance as they pass by me; they seem rather like figures on a Greek Vase—a man and two women whom [illegible] myself could distinguish in their disguisement. [illegible] *happiness, and is a rare instance of the advantage* [illegible] *powering the Mind.*[4]

Such materialism renders perfectly [illegible] revolt alike from the severity of Wordsworth's [illegible] philosophy, and from the active [illegible] poetry, epic or dramatic. What would [illegible] for example, have said to the [illegible] languid and sleepy hero of *Endymion*?

Now if this earthly love [illegible]
Men's being mortal, [illegible]
Ambition from their [illegible]
Their measure of [illegible]
Seems all this poor [illegible]
To one who keeps [illegible]

[1] *Letters of John Keats*, p. 65. [2] [illegible]
[4] Keats' *Works* [illegible]

A love immortal, an immortal too.
Look not so wildered; for these things are true,
And never can be born of atomies
That buzz about our slumbers like brain flies,
Leaving us fancy-sick.[1]

Wordsworth, though, in his first sympathy with the French Revolution, he had detached himself from the historic life of his country, sought to replenish the springs of action with the conscious reasoning of philosophy; Keats boldly proclaims the superiority of the ideal life of poetic imagination to that of political action:

Hence pageant history! hence gilded cheat!
Swart planet in the universe of deeds!
Wide sea that one continuous murmur breeds
Along the pebbled shore of memory!
Many old rotten-timber'd boats there be
Upon thy vaporous bosom magnified
To goodly vessels; many a sail of pride
And golden-keel'd, is left unlaunch'd and dry.
And wherefore this? What care though owl did fly
About the great Athenian admiral's mast?
What care though striding Alexander past
The Indus with his Macedonian numbers?
Though old Ulysses tortur'd from his slumbers
The glutted Cyclops, what care? Juliet leaning
Amid her window-flowers,—sighing—weaning
Tenderly her fancy from its maiden snow,
Doth more avail than these: the silver flow
Of Hero's tears, the swoon of Imogen,
Fair Pastorella in the bandits' den,
Are things to brood on with more ardency
Than the death-day of empires.[2]

In the poem entitled *Sleep and Poetry*, that closes the volume published in 1817, he expresses the hope of being one day able to bring ideal life and unity into the crowd of incoherent images by which his mind is haunted:

But off, Despondence! miserable bane!
They should not know thee, who athirst to gain
A noble end are thirsty every hour.
What though I am not wealthy in the dower

[1] *Endymion*, Book i. 844-54. Compare with this Sarpedon's speech to Glaucus in *Iliad* xii. 310-28.
[2] *Endymion*, Book ii. 14-34.

Of spanning wisdom; though I do not know
The shiftings of the mighty winds that blow
Hither and thither all the changing thoughts
Of man: though no great minist'ring reason sorts
Out the dark mysteries of human souls
To clear conceiving: yet there ever rolls
A vast idea before me, and I glean
Therefrom my liberty: thence too I've seen
The end and aim of Poesy.

2. The "idea," thus dimly conceived, embodied itself in an attempt to employ mythology in poetry, as an instrument for communicating to the world Keats' own impressions of external Nature. Of Greek mythology he knew little through the direct medium of Classical poetry. His education had been brief and perfunctory, and his knowledge of the ancient legends was for the most part derived from Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* or Sandys' translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* But his appetite for poetry, which had been early developed, was fed mainly upon the works of the Elizabethan writers, who had freely availed themselves of the materials of mythology; and his first desire was to revive the Elizabethan manner in opposition to the literary fashions of his own age. "Is there," he asks,

Is there so small a range
In the present strength of manhood that the high
Imagination cannot freely fly
As she was wont of old? prepare her steeds
Paw up against the light, and do strange deeds
Upon the clouds? Has she not shown us all?
From the clear space of ether to the small
Breath of new buds unfolding? From the meaning
Of Jove's large eye-brow to the tender greening
Of April meadows? Here her altar shone,
E'en in this isle; and who could paragon
The fervid choir that lifted up a noise
Of harmony, to where it ay will poise
Its mighty sphere of convoluting sound
Huge as a planet, and like that roll round,
Eternally around a dizzy void?
Ay, in those days the Muses were nigh cloy'd
With honours, nor had any other care
Than to sing out and smooth their wavy hair[1]

[1] *Sleep and Poetry*

on principles of independent taste. In 1813 an attack upon the Prince Regent brought upon the Editor a prosecution for libel and two years' imprisonment in Surrey gaol. On his release he naturally figured as a martyr in Whig circles, and extended the range of his literary influence.

In 1816 Hunt published his *Story of Rimini*, a poem which formed a new starting-point in the campaign against "poetical diction," begun by Wordsworth in his well-known Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800. The tale was told in heroic couplets, written in a style which Hunt professed to be a return to the manner of Dryden, but which was really only a disintegration of the historic structure of the decasyllabic metre. Hunt thought it was sufficient to assert his freedom by disregarding the distinct, though varied, pause at the close of each couplet; and with this rhythmical change he combined a revolution in the character of metrical diction far more radical than that of Wordsworth. On the face of his theory, indeed, its subversive tendencies were not apparent:

> "With the endeavour," says he in his Preface to the *Story of Rimini*, "to recur to a freer spirit of versification, I have joined one of still greater importance—that of having a free and idiomatic cast of language. There is a cant of art as well as of nature. But the proper language of poetry is in fact nothing different from that of real life, and depends for dignity upon the strength and sentiments of what it speaks. It is only adding musical modulation to what a fine understanding might actually utter in the midst of its griefs and enjoyments. The poet should do as Shakespeare and Chaucer did, not copy what is obsolete or peculiar, but use as much as possible an actual existing language, omitting mere vulgarisms and fugitive phrases which are cant of ordinary discourse."

In the last volume I traced the growth of the "familiar style" in English poetry.[1] I showed that it was formed gradually by a number of writers who from their position were acquainted with the character of conversation in the best society, and were able to refine and elevate this through their knowledge of the best literature of their country. I showed also by examples with what great

[1] Vol. v. chap. v.

variety this principle of *usus* was applied in the hands of masters like Prior, Pope, Gay, Swift, Goldsmith, and Cowper. But evidently the achievement of a "familiar" style in poetry must depend upon the tact of the writer in showing his perception of what is essentially meant by "mere vulgarisms and fugitive phrases"; and this perception Hunt never attained. The intense vulgarity of his breeding is characteristically revealed in his rendering of the episode of Paolo and Francesca, handled by Dante with such perfection of reserve. The following shows Hunt's conception of "the proper language of poetry . . . that depends for *dignity* upon the strength and sentiments of what it speaks":

> "May I come in?" said he—it made her start,—
> That smiling voice;—she colour'd, press'd her heart
> A moment, as for breath, and then with free
> And usual tone said,—"O yes,—certainly."
> *There's wont to be, at conscious times like these,*
> An affectation of a bright-eyed ease,
> An air of something quite serene and sure,
> As if to seem so, were to be, secure.
> With this the lovers looked, with this they spoke,
> With this sat down to read the self-same book,
> And Paulo, by degrees, gently embrac'd
> With one permitted arm her lovely waist;
> And both their cheeks, like peaches on a tree,
> Came with a touch together thrillingly,
> And o'er the book they hung, and nothing said,
> And every lingering page grew longer as they read.
>
> As thus they sat, and felt with leaps of heart
> Their colour change, they came upon the part
> Where fond Genevra, with her flame long nurst,
> Smil'd upon Launcelot, when he kiss'd her first:—
> That touch, at last, through every fibre slid;
> And Paulo turn'd, scarce knowing what he did,
> Only he felt he could no more dissemble,
> And kiss'd her on her mouth, *all in a tremble*[1]

"*At conscious times like these*"! Hunt would probably have said that his every touch was but an expansion of what he found in Dante; and such is the case, but the following is the way in which the poet, who had received a liberal

[1] *Story of Rimini.*

education, in the atmosphere which produced the legislation of the Courts of Love, thinks it best to tell the story:

> Noi leggevamo un giorno per diletto
> —Di Lancilotto, come amor lo strinse:
> Soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto.
> Per più fiate gli occhi ci sospinse
> Quella letteratura, e scolorocci 'l viso;
> Ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.
> Quando legemmo il disiato riso
> Esser baciato da cotanto amante,
> Questi che mai da me non sia diviso
> La bocca mi baciò tutto tremante:
> Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse:
> Quel giorno più non vi legemmo avante.[1]

After Keats' introduction by Cowden Clarke to Hunt in 1816, the latter, besides publishing many of the poet's compositions in *The Examiner*, wrote an enthusiastic review, commending his genius, together with that of Reynolds and Shelley, to the notice of the public. On his side Keats, naturally much elated by the admiration which Hunt, and the frequenters of Hunt's coterie bestowed upon his work, felt no doubts as to the complete artistic soundness of the critical position from which he was starting under the auspices of his guide. The volume of his poems published in 1817 affords many proofs of the ascendency which Hunt's opinions at this period exercised over his practice: among others it contains the poem called *Sleep and Poetry*, in which, after describing the character of Elizabethan poetry in the passage cited above, he proceeds:

> Could all this be forgotten? Yes, a schism
> Nurtured by foppery and barbarism
> Made great Apollo blush for this his land:
> Men were thought wise who could not understand
> His glories: with a puling infant's force
> They swayed about upon a rocking-horse,

[1] "We read one day, for our pleasure, of Lancelot, how he was constrained by love. We were alone, and without any suspicion. Many times that reading suspended our eyes and made pale our face; but one moment alone was what overcame us. When we read of the longed-for smile being kissed by such a lover, he who may never more be parted from me kissed me, all trembling, on the mouth. Galeotto was the book and he who wrote it: that day we read in it no further" (Dante, *Inferno*, v. 127-39).

And thought it Pegasus. Ah! dismal souled!
The winds of heaven blew, the ocean rolled
Its gathering waves—ye felt it not. The blue
Bared its eternal bosom, and the dew
Of summer nights collected still to make
The summer precious: beauty was awake!
Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead
To things ye knew not of—were closely wed
To musty laws lined out with wretched rule
And compass vile: so that ye taught a school
Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit,
Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,
Their verses tallied. Easy was the task:
A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask
Of Poesy. Ill-fated, impious race!
That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face,
And did not know it,—no, they went about,
Holding a poor decrepid standard out,
Mark'd with most flimsy mottos, and in large
The name of one Boileau!

It is difficult to say whether the offensive or the ridiculous predominates more in this criticism. That a young man, with the slenderest education, should sneer at an author, famous among the most famous writers of France, as "one Boileau," was sufficiently arrogant; that he should suppose that masters of language like Dryden, Addison, Pope, Swift, Johnson, and Goldsmith, in their varied styles of versification, were the mechanical products of Boileau's rules, was sufficiently absurd; but that he should conceive the development of the English language in the latter part of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth century to have been the result of

A schism
Nurtured by foppery and barbarism,

and have pictured to himself Johnson, for example, as a puling infant, "swayed about upon a rocking-horse," shows the active mischief that was being wrought in the sphere of social and literary taste by the inflated vanity of men like Leigh Hunt.

Perhaps even more pernicious to Keats than Hunt's bad taste was the atmosphere of "mutual admiration"

prevailing in the literary coterie of Hampstead, and particularly in the female portion of it. No influence is more apparent in the English poetry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century than that of the refined and tasteful imagination of the ladies who fixed the standard of manners in the court of Elizabeth and her successor. Vast indeed is the contrast when we compare the tone in which Ben Jonson or Donne pay their addresses to the Countess of Bedford with that adopted by Keats in his amorous poetry. His fancy was inspired by the literary images of the ages of chivalry, but he knew nothing of the spirit by which the manners of those ages were at once animated and restrained. In his *Induction to a Poem* he writes:

> Lo! I must tell a tale of chivalry
> For large dark plumes are dancing in my eye.

He is here evidently moved by the mere external descriptions of pageants and processions in the *Story of Rimini*; but when he comes to the tale itself, the only action performed by his chivalrous hero, Calidore, is to lift two young women off their horses—an incident over which he lingers thus:

> What a kiss
> What gentle *squeeze* he gave each lady's hand!
> How tremblingly their delicate ancles spann'd!
> Into how sweet a trance his soul was gone,
> While whisperings of affection
> Made him delay to let their tender feet
> Come to the earth; with an incline so sweet
> From their low palfreys o'er his neck they bent:
> And whether there were tears of languishment,
> Or that the evening dew had pearl'd their tresses,
> He feels a moisture on his cheek, and blesses
> With lips that tremble, and with glistening eye,
> All the soft luxury
> That nestled in his arms.

In another poem he says that, when he sees a woman "meek, and kind, and tender," he "hotly burns to be a Calidore"; nevertheless his fancy is always dwelling on the outward feminine form:

Light feet, dark violet eyes, and parted hair;
Soft dimpled hands, white neck, and creamy breast,
Are things on which the dazzled senses rest,
Till the fond fixed eyes forget they *stare*.

Even in his later poems he is unable to extricate himself from the vulgar and sensuous imagery that Hunt's treatment of amorous subjects had evoked in his fancy. In the lines *To Fanny* he writes:

Who now, with greedy looks, eats up my feast?
What *stare* outfaces now my silver moon?
Ah! keep that hand unravish'd at the least;
    Let, let the amorous burn—
    But pr'ythee, do not turn
The current of your heart from me so soon.
    O! save in charity
    The quickest pulse for me.

Unquestionable as were the proofs of genius that he gave, the same marks of ill-breeding characterise Keats' poetical style so long as he remained under the influence of Hunt. His modes of versification, as displayed in his first published volume and in *Endymion*, are a signal illustration of the "cockneyisms" of the Hampstead School. In the volume of 1817 the poem beginning "I stood tiptoe," *Sleep and Poetry*, *Calidore*, and the various epistles, are all written in rhyming decasyllabic lines, running into each other after the manner recommended by Hunt. The diction is familiar, but unfortunately also vulgar: colloquial meannesses are mixed with such archaic forms as "upswimmeth"; bad rhymes ("morning—dawning," "water—shorter," "sorts—thoughts") are frequent; double or triple rhymes, suggested by mere sound, constantly offend, *e.g.*:

There must be too a ruin dark, and gloomy,
To say "joy not too much in all that's *bloomy*.'

Him whose name's to every heart a solace,
High-minded and unbending William Wallace.

Miltonian storms, and more, Miltonian tenderness,
Michael in arms, and more, meek Eve's fair slenderness

The same metre, similarly treated, is chosen for the metrical vehicle of *Endymion*, the first poem in which he sought to embody his "vast idea" of ancient mythology mixed with modern allegory, and which may therefore be regarded either as a mere story, like one of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or as an allegorical representation of Nature and Society in the sense intended by Keats. Considered in the former light, *Endymion* cannot be reckoned a success. Keats had nothing of the genius of a story-teller. He chooses as his hero a youth not less effeminate than Marino's Adonis, and the languid trickle of the metre in which the adventures and experiences of this person are recorded—a mixture of the rambling style of Browne in *Britannia's Pastorals* with Hunt's colloquialism in the *Story of Rimini*—furnishes a striking contrast to the masculine treatment of the heroic couplet by Dryden, in such a story, for example, as *Cymon and Iphigenia*.

As an allegory of life, Keats' poem is hardly more satisfactory than as a tale of action. It is difficult to discover any higher aim in it than the praise of sensuous love, compared with the activity inspired by fame and ambition; and as to the manner in which the poet uses the heroic couplet for ethical purposes, the following passage may serve as an example:

> There are who lord it o'er their fellow men
> With most prevailing tinsel, who unpen
> Their baaing vanities, to browse away
> The comfortable, green, and juicy hay
> From human pastures; or—O torturing fact!
> Who, through an idiot blink, will see unpacked
> Fire-branded foxes to sear up and singe
> Our gold and ripe-eared hopes. With not one tinge
> Of sanctuary splendour, not a sight
> Able to face an owl's, they still are dight
> By the blear-ey'd nations in empurpled vests,
> And crowns, and turbans. With unladen breasts,
> Save of blown self-applause, they proudly mount
> To their spirit's perch, their being's high account,
> Their tip-top nothings, their dull skies, their thrones—
> Amid the fierce intoxicating tones

[illegible]

Like thunder clouds that spake to Babylon,
And set those old Chaldaeans to their tasks[1]

Keats here appears to be attacking certain persons high in authority and in the world's esteem; but who they are, or what they have to do with the story of Endymion, there is nothing to show. Metaphorical imagery is prodigally employed, but in no way serves—its only useful purpose—to make thought lucid and precise: on the contrary, the mass of invertebrate verbal matter poured forth, without any attempt at selection, obscures all meaning, bringing to mind what Keats says of his own sensations in the midst of the multiplicity of natural objects:

When it is moving on luxurious wings,
The soul is lost in pleasant smotherings.

How inartistic seems the above passage when compared with the intellectual force and delicacy shown by Goldsmith, for example,—one of Keats' "dolts,"—in subduing thought to metre through a didactic poem like *The Traveller*!

[illegible] to pronounce *Endymion* a [illegible]s' "vast idea." He himself [illegible] of the poem, and up to a [illegible]tment which it experienced from the critics was deserved. But the fine quality of his genius is shown unmistakably, not only by the confidence with which, in the midst of failure, he clung to a belief in the truth of his original intuition, but still more by his severe self-judgment in noting the imperfections of his work, and in gradually recognising the limits within which his powers could be properly exercised

Perceiving that *Endymion* fell below epic requirements through the vulgarity of its diction, he soon freed himself from the influence of Hunt; but, still aspiring to embody his "vast idea" in an epic form, he attempted to elevate his style by employing a mode of diction resembling that

[1] *Endymion*, Book III. 1-21.

of *Paradise Lost*. As far back as September 1817, while *Endymion* was still unfinished, his imagination, as we learn from his correspondence, was occupied with "a new romance,"[1] which can only have been *Hyperion*.

He had here conceived a far more manly subject than in *Endymion*—viz. the fall of the Titans; under guise of which allegory he no doubt intended to expound his own theory, that "first in beauty should be first in might," by describing the victory of Apollo, the god of music and poetry, over Hyperion, the old Titanic ruler of the Sun. There is no evidence to show whether he ever had in his mind a complete conception of the form which his poem was to assume. *Hyperion* remains a fine torso, which, like all splendid fragments, raises great ideas of what it might have been if completed. But it is a *tour de force* rather than a poetical organism, and scarcely seems to contain in itself the embryo of a modern epic. Unprejudiced readers will probably agree with the opinion of Jeffrey:

A... sufficiently obvious that the subject is too far
satisfactory than ...sources of human interest to be success-
discover any higher aim in ... author."[2] Only an uncritical
love, compared with the activi...ment of Shelley, that "the
ambition; and as to the manner ...throned and the fallen
the heroic couplet for ethical purpo...bellious angels in
passage may serve as an example: ...terest—and that
... colossal
...e mytho-
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> There are who lord it o'er their fellow men
> With most prevailing tinsel, who unpen
> Their baaing vanities, to browse away
> The comfortable, green, and juicy hay
> From human pastures; or—O torturing fact!
> Who, through an idiot blink, will see unpacked
> Fire-branded foxes to sear up and singe
> Our gold and ripe-eared hopes. With not one tinge
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> Able to face an owl's, they still are dight
> By the blear-ey'd nations in empurpled vests,
> And crowns, and turbans. With unladen breasts,
> Save of blown self-applause, they proudly mount
> To their spirit's perch, their being's high account,
> Their tip-top nothings, their dull skies, their thrones—
> Amid the fierce intoxicating tones

already attempted to show, the genius of a *creator*.[1] Keats possessed this; his end and aim in poetry was to find words to clothe the images of Beauty that blossomed in his fancy, in forms and colours analogous to those of painting. For the purposes of the epic or the drama, where movement and energy of action are required, this method of composition was unsuitable; but in poems involving picturesque episodes, in odes embodying a vein of sensuous reflection, in short tales of love giving scope for passages of voluptuous description, Keats' faculty of word-painting shines with incomparable brilliancy. It was the consciousness of possessing this power that, at the outset of his career, turned his fancy instinctively into the rich fields of Greek mythology; and he must have been aware that the only passages in *Endymion* that successfully incorporated his "vast idea" were the Hymn to Pan in the first Book, and the translation into words, in the fourth Book, of Titian's picture of Bacchus and Ariadne. In the latter is displayed a splendour of imagery comparable with Spenser's, when he is luxuriating in the description of an allegorical masque or pageant; nor is there, in the easy flow of Keats' metre, anything of the conscious archaism of language with which both Spenser and Chatterton "affect the obsolete." It will be observed, too, that the following passage is entirely free from the injudicious mixture of ancient words and modern colloquialisms which disfigures the rest of *Endymion*:

> And as I sat, over the light blue hills
> There came a noise of revellers: the rills
> Into the wide stream came of purple hue—
>   'Twas Bacchus and his crew!
> The earnest trumpet spake, and silver thrills
> From kissing cymbals made a merry din—
>   'Twas Bacchus and his kin!
> Like to a moving vintage down they came,
> Crowned with green leaves, and faces all on flame;
> All madly dancing through the pleasant valley,
>   To scare thee, Melancholy!

[1] Vol. v. p. 418.

O then, O then, thou wast a simple name!
And I forgot thee, as the berried holly
By shepherds is forgotten, when, in June,
Tall chestnuts keep away the sun and moon:—
I rush'd into the folly!

. . . . .

Whence came ye, merry Damsels! whence came ye!
So many, and so many, and such glee?
Why have ye left your bowers desolate,
Your lutes, and gentler fate?—
We follow Bacchus! Bacchus on the wing,
A conquering!
Bacchus, young Bacchus! good or ill betide,
We dance before him thorough kingdoms wide:—
Come hither, lady fair, and joined be
To our wild minstrelsy!"

Whence came ye, jolly Satyrs! whence came ye!
So many, and so many, and such glee?
Why have ye left your forest haunts, why left
Your nuts in oak-tree cleft?—
"For wine, for wine we left our kernel tree;
For wine we left our heath, and yellow brooms,
And cold mushrooms;
For wine we follow Bacchus through the earth;
Great God of breathless cups and chirping mirth!—
Come hither, lady fair, and joined be
To our mad minstrelsy!"[1]

By the time that he had finished *Endymion*, Keats had realised where his imaginative strength lay, and in *Isabella*, *Lamia*, and, more particularly still, in *The Eve of St Agnes*—all of them narrative poems—he reveals very plainly his method of composition. He cares little for the action of the story as such. His subjects are suggested to him by chance excursions into such mediaeval literature as Boccaccio's *Decameron* or Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*; but instead of relating his incidents swiftly and plainly, like the original authors, he fixes his imagination intently on those details of the subject which appear to be of a picturesque nature, and brings them into strong relief in a profusion of luxurious verbal imagery For his heroes, who are always "swooning" in an amorous atmosphere, it is impossible to feel any respect; but the absorbing grief

[1] *Endymion*, Book iv. 195 240.

of Isabella for her murdered lover is sculptured in metrical words with a vivid intensity that awakes strong sympathy in the reader. After describing the discovery of Lorenzo's body and the removal of his head, the poet proceeds:

In anxious secrecy they took it home,
  And then the prize was all for Isabel:
She calm'd its wild hair with a golden comb,
  And all around each eye's sepulchral cell
Pointed each fringed lash; the smeared loam
  With tears, as chilly as a dripping well,
She drench'd away:—and still she comb'd, and kept
Sighing all day—and still she kiss'd, and wept.

Then in a silken scarf,—sweet with the dew
  Of precious flowers pluck'd in Araby,
And divine liquids come with odorous ooze
  Through the cold serpent-pipe refreshfully,—
She wrapp'd it up; and for its tomb did choose
  A garden-pot, wherein she laid it by,
And cover'd it with mould, and o'er it set
Sweet Basil, which her tears kept ever wet.

And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
  And she forgot the blue above the trees,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
  And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
  And the new morn she saw not: but in peace
Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,
And moisten'd it with tears unto the core.[1]

A like intensity is shown in realising pictorially the transformation of the snake in *Lamia* into a woman,—a passage which, with all its power, is too loathly for quotation —while the description of the marriage banquet in that poem, with its gleams of red wine in golden goblets, and the reflection in the lofty mirrors of the vapours rising luxuriously from the incense, is thoroughly characteristic of Keats' genius as a painter-poet:

Of wealthy lustre was the banquet-room,
Fill'd with pervading brilliance and perfume:
Before each lucid panel fuming stood
A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood,
Each by a sacred tripod held aloft,
Whose slender feet wide-swerved upon the soft

[1] *Isabella*, li.-liii.

Wool-woofed carpets: fifty wreaths of smoke
From fifty censers their light voyage took
To the high roof, still mimick'd as they rose
Along the mirror'd walls by twin-clouds odorous
Twelve sphered tables, by silk seats insphered,
High as the level of a man's breast rear'd
On libbard's paws, upheld the heavy gold
Of cups and goblets, and the store thrice told
Of Ceres' horn, and, in huge vessels, wine
Come from the gloomy tun with merry shine.
Thus loaded with a feast the tables stood,
Each shrining in the midst the image of a God.[1]

The art of poetical word-painting culminates in the imagery employed in the opening stanza of *The Eve of St. Agnes* to express the sensations of extreme cold:

St. Agnes' Eve—ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

For gorgeousness of colour in metrical language the description of the stained-glass window in Madeline's chamber is unrivalled:

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imageries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep damask'd wings;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings [2]

Keats' Odes are charged with a peculiar intensity, because in them he employs his first principle of art to illustrate his own emotional and philosophical theory of life. The idea of an unseen life in Nature, common to both Wordsworth and Keats, is arrived at by the former through a process of intellectual analysis, but forces itself

[1] *Lamia*, Part ii. [2] *Eve of St. Agnes*, xxiv

on the mind of the latter by means of images and words. The sight of the sculptures on a Grecian Urn awakens for his imagination melodies inaudible to the ear: the song of a nightingale, floating on the dark, is the symbol to him of stable beauty in the midst of perpetually changing human misery. In the one case, he says:

> Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
> Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
> Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
> Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
> Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
> Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
> Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair![1]

In the same vein, though to more pessimistic effect, is the reflection in the *Ode to a Nightingale*:

> Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
> No hungry generations tread thee down;
> The voice I hear this passing night was heard
> In ancient days by emperor and clown:
> Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
> The same that oft-times hath
> Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.
>
> Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
> To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
> Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
> As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
> Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
> Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
> Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
> In the next valley glades:
> Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
> Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?[2]

To sum up historically the effects of the Romantic Movement as culminating in the poetry of Keats, it is necessary to recognise how essentially its life is connected with the social causes that produced the French Revolution

[1] *Ode on a Grecian Urn.* [2] *Ode to a Nightingale*, 7, 8.

and how vividly the secret influences that determined the successive stages of its course are revealed in the respective poetic ideals of Wordsworth, Shelley, and the author of *Lamia*. There can be no question that these three poets derived political inspiration from the same source, namely, that atmosphere of boundless hope which exalted the imagination of Europe on the eve of the French Revolution,—a state of feeling created by the belief that the revolutionary ideal of Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality, would not only destroy the evils of a corrupt tradition, but would inaugurate the moral regeneration of mankind. Wordsworth, in his poetical Autobiography, describes the universal enthusiasm that prevailed on his first visit to France:

> Nature then was sovereign in my mind,
> And mighty forms, seizing a youthful fancy,
> Had given a charter to irregular hopes.
> In any age of uneventful calm
> Among the nations, surely would my heart
> Have been possessed by similar desire;
> But Europe at that time was filled with joy,
> France standing on the top of golden hours,
> And human nature seeming born again [1]

A generation passed, and in spite of the fact that the French Revolution had ended in the military despotism of Napoleon, that this had been followed by the autocracy of the Holy Alliance, and that the supremacy of the aristocracy of birth had merely been replaced by that of the aristocracy of wealth, the old republican dream of the regenerating moral powers of Liberty was still cherished by the hero of *The Revolt of Islam*:

> It must be so—I will arise and waken
> The multitude, and like a sulphurous hill,
> Which on a sudden from its snows had shaken
> The swoon of ages, it shall burst and fill
> The world with cleansing fire; it must, it will,
> It may not be restrained [2]

Keats expresses the same belief in the expanding and

[1] Wordsworth, *The Prelude* "Cambridge and the Alps."
[2] *Revolt of Islam*, Canto ii. 14.

cleansing influence of Liberty on the world of Imagination and Art:

> Great spirits now on earth are sojourning,
> He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,
> Who, on Helvellyn's summit, wide awake,
> Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing:[1]
> He of the rose, the violet, the spring,
> The social smile, the chain for Freedom's sake:[2]
> And lo!—whose steadfastness would never take
> A meaner sound than Raphael's whispering.[3]
> And other spirits there are standing apart
> Upon the forehead of the age to come;
> These, these will give the world another heart,
> And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum
> Of mighty workings?——
> Listen awhile ye nations, and be dumb.[4]

Not less universal was the effect of the disappointment of these high revolutionary hopes on the Art of Poetry. Political disenchantment inevitably led to a divorce between poetical imagination and social action. Poetry, removing its gaze from the external world, turned it inward, in the manner described by Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, and looked for its inspiration from the solitary intercourse between material Nature and the individual Mind. Wordsworth indeed speaks of the genius of the Poet as if it were a single instrument, made to produce only one kind of music; but, as a matter of fact, the removal of the sphere of Poetry from social action to psychological introspection produced a conflict of poetical ideals varying according to the temperament and training of each individual imagination. The poet of *The Excursion* justifies his retreat from the world of action by the salutary moral influences of monastic meditation.

> O blest seclusion! when the mind admits
> The law of duty; and can therefore move
> Through each vicissitude of loss and gain,
> Linked in entire complacence with her choice,
> When youth's presumptuousness is mellowed down
> And manhood's vain anxiety dismissed.[5]

[1] Wordsworth. [2] Leigh Hunt. [3] Haydon.
[4] Keats' sonnet addressed to Haydon. [5] *The Excursion*, Book iv.

This did not satisfy Shelley. In the Preface to *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude*, he says:

> The intellectual faculties, the imagination, the functions of sense, have their respective requisitions on the sympathy of corresponding powers in other human beings. The Poet is represented as uniting these requisitions, and attaching them to a single image. He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave.

Hence the character, at once social and revolutionary, of Shelley's epic and his dramas; hence, too, the emotional intensity of the lyrics in which he expresses the sufferings he endures, through his inability to find in actual life any goal for the aspirations of his thought.

Keats, in *Endymion*, represents his hero, like the poet in *Alastor*, as seeking in Nature for the "prototype of his conception"; but, unlike the latter, he endeavours, as a poet, to satisfy his imagination by embodying in words the images of his own mind. He finds an epicurean pleasure in the solitary contemplation of abstract forms of Beauty. Explaining to one of his brothers his objections to marriage, he says:

> My Happiness would not be so fine as my Solitude is sublime. . . . The mighty Abstract Idea I have of beauty in all things stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness. An amiable wife and sweet children I contemplate as part of that Beauty—but I must have a thousand of those beautiful particles to fill up my heart. I feel more and more every day as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds.[1]

His idea of poetry differed from Wordsworth's, in that he felt that the imagination required for its satisfaction something external to itself, and from Shelley's, because he believed that its aspirations could be satisfied with the creations of Art. But he was at one with both of them in removing his artistic ideal from the action of existing society.

[1] *Letters of John Keats*, p 180.

cleansing influence of Liberty on the world of Imagination and Art:

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  He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,
  Who, on Helvellyn's summit, wide awake,
Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing:[1]
He of the rose, the violet, the spring,
  The social smile, the chain for Freedom's sake:[2]
  And lo!—whose steadfastness would never take
A meaner sound than Raphael's whispering.[3]
And other spirits there are standing apart
  Upon the forehead of the age to come;
These, these will give the world another heart,
  And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum
Of mighty workings?——
  Listen awhile ye nations, and be dumb.[4]

one educated in the self-conscious Wordsworthian atmosphere. The enthusiastic admirers of Keats take him at his own valuation, and maintain that he was always advancing towards some point of pure artistic creation. But as a matter of fact, when he endeavoured to create objectively, he constantly deceived himself as to the nature and limits of his poetical faculty. For example, he writes to his publisher, Taylor, at a late period of his poetical development:

I have come to a determination not to publish anything I have now ready written; but, for all that, to publish a poem before long, and that I hope to make a fine one. As the marvellous is the most enticing, and the surest guarantee of harmonious numbers, I have been endeavouring to persuade myself to untether Fancy, and to let her manage for herself.[1]

The poem he had in mind was the ill-conceived *Cap and Bells.* And again Keats actually believed that his tragedy *Otho the Great* was likely to succeed on the stage.

"Mine, I am sure," he says, in a letter to his brother George and his wife, "is a tolerable tragedy; it would have been a bank to me, if just as I had finished it I had not heard of Kean's resolution to go to America."[2]

The following is the account given by Keats' friend Brown of the manner in which this tragedy was composed:

At Shanklin he undertook a difficult task; I engaged to furnish him with the title, characters, and dramatic conduct of a tragedy, and he was to enwrap it in poetry. The progress of this work was curious, for while I sat opposite to him, he caught my description of each scene entire, with the characters to be brought forward, the events, and everything connected with it. Thus he went on, scene after scene, never knowing nor enquiring into the scene which was to follow, until four acts were completed.[3]

The result is of course an ill-compacted jumble, unintelligible as action and unreal in respect of character. Self-delusion must indeed have been great, when it

[1] *Letters of John Keats*, p. 333 [2] *Ibid* p. 291.
[3] *Keats' Poetical Works* (Buxton Forman), p. xxxix.

persuaded Keats (usually a sound judge of his own work) that a manufactured play, of which the soul—that is to say, the conception and general outline of incident and character—was inspired by one imagination, while the body—the diction and rhetoric—was furnished externally by another, could ever have possessed enough unity of ideal life to arouse sympathy and emotion in the mind of a theatrical audience.

Nevertheless the experiment of *Otho the Great* is historically valuable as throwing light on the essential character of the poetical movement inaugurated by Keats. In all that he did Keats was animated by an artistic purpose; his "end and aim" in poetry was to enlarge the sphere of ideal liberty by imaginative creation. At first he fancied that he could achieve his purpose by employing the larger forms of the epic and the drama; and, as *Otho the Great* shows, he never quite abandoned the hope. But in practice he steadily contracted the "vast idea" with which he started, and, yielding to a semi-conscious artistic instinct, gave up all thought of imitating social action in an ideal form, while he concentrated his efforts on reproducing, in metrical language, but in sculpturesque or pictorial fashion, the images which he found in his own mind. Striking as were the artistic results that he produced by this method, it is an error to suppose that he succeeded in thus enlarging the sphere of poetical liberty: on the contrary, by approximating poetry to the plastic arts, he necessarily eliminated that element in the former which is derived from the imitation of *action*. His brilliant fancy brought into prominent relief the qualities that delight the imagination in the pictorial allegory of *The Faery Queene* and in the descriptions and similes of *Paradise Lost*. But this was to exalt one side of poetry at the expense of the whole: the scope of Spenser's and Milton's creation was far more comprehensive. Whatever difficulties Spenser encountered in the execution of his poetical task, his aim was an active and social one, namely, to present the character of a perfect knight or gentleman in an ideal form. With still higher artistic powers, Milton

brought all the picturesque resources of poetry to bear on the intellectual purpose of an epic work, the main end of which was "to justify the ways of God to man." The spirit of action, by which these two poets were animated, qualified one for the use of the large form of allegorical romance, and the other for the use of the classical epic. Keats, by isolating himself from the active society about him, was obliged to restrict the expression of his idea of "Abstract Beauty" within the limits of the sonnet, the ode, and the modernised "fabliau."

Thus confined, the positive artistic results that he achieved were truly admirable. Of the sonnets, the early one "On first looking into Chapman's Homer," the one anticipating Death before fulfilling his poetical designs, and the final one beginning "Bright Star," seem to be of especial excellence as examples of his pictorial genius. The imagery in them is at once appropriate and sublime. In such lines as

> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
>   When a new planet swims into his ken;
> Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
>   He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
> Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
>   Silent, upon a peak in Darien:

or

> When I have fears that I may cease to be
>   Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
> Before high-piled books, in charact'ry,
>   Hold like full garners the full-ripen'd grain;
> When I behold upon the night's starr'd face,
>   Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
> And think that I may never live to trace
>   Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
> And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
>   That I may never look upon thee more,
> Never have relish in the faery power
>   Of unreflecting love!—then on the shore
> Of the wide world I stand alone, and think,
> Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

or

> Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art—
>   Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
> And watching with eternal lids apart,
>   Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,

The moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the soft new fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors:

in compositions like these we find, not only that "the best words are in the best places," but that each word is so charged with meaning as to hold the emotion it contains with the fixity of marble.

In *Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes*, and *Lamia*, the value lies not in the narrative of action (in spite of the claims advanced on its behalf, the rhythmical flow of *Lamia* compares unfavourably with Dryden's use of the heroic couplet, which it seeks to emulate), but in the extraordinary skill with which, by means of words and images, romantic stories found in old books are conjured into an illusive life, and surrounded with a warm modern atmosphere.

It is, however, in his *Odes* that Keats has most enduringly enshrined his idea of "Abstract Beauty." In these—particularly the *Nightingale*, *Autumn*, and the *Grecian Urn*—the underlying feeling is always the same, a yearning desire to merge the imagination in some ideal form of life apart from experience and action. All Keats' personality seems to be breathed into these compositions. He was *felix opportunitate mortis*. No poet has left behind him so many experimental fragments raising ideas of what he might have achieved in the way of creation had his days been longer. Yet, as I have attempted to show, with his attitude towards human life and action, he could hardly have succeeded in giving expression to his "vast idea" of poetry on an extensive scale. He himself abandoned *Hyperion*, perceiving its essential defects, as the subject of an epic poem. He made no attempt to finish the *Eve of St. Mark*, though a theme suitable to his genius. The *Cap and Bells* is a failure alike in conception and execution. But in the few years allotted to him his pen found time to "glean his teeming brain" of images that will endure as long as the English language is spoken. He was able to

express in words his abstract idea of an English Autumn with a richness of language calling up before the mind the pictures of Gainsborough or Constable:

> Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
>   Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
> Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
>   Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
> Or . . . .
> . . . .
> . . . . :
> And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
>   Steady thy laden head across a brook;
>   Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
>   Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.
>
> Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
>   Think not of them, thou hast thy music too—
> While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
>   And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
> Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
>   Among the river sallows, borne aloft
>   Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
> And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
>   Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
>   The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft,
>   *And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.*

Inspiration of the same kind made him associate with the song of the nightingale in the dark the images, at once picturesque and mysterious, of Ruth in the fields of Bethlehem and the "magic casements" of Claude's Enchanted Castle; and it suggested also the sculptural ideas in his monumental ode on the *Grecian Urn*:

> O Attic Shape! Fair Attitude! with brede
>   Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
> With forest branches and with trodden weed,
>   Thou, silent form, dost teaze us out of thought
> As doth Eternity: Cold Pastoral!
>   When old Age shall this generation waste,
>   Thou shalt remain in midst of other woe
> Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st:
>   "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
>   Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know

The epigram indeed will not bear intellectual examination. A proposition of Euclid is true but it is not

beautiful; nor, if it were, could the mere knowledge of what is ideally beautiful satisfy the wants of the soul; but as an example of the power of Poetry at once to illustrate and to supplement the functions of a sister Art, the Ode itself is a marvellous performance.

A word must be added to show how faithfully, in lealing with the materials of language, Keats' hand kept n touch with the perceptions of his imagination. It s plain not only that the foundations of his poetical rocabulary were laid in his literary reading rather than n the structure of spoken English, but also that his emperament, taste, and imagination took him for his eading to authors who, in their thought and expression, were far removed from the manners of his own age. Hence, in *Endymion*—the poem in which he first endeavoured to express his "vast idea" of Nature on an ample scale—we find a reproduction of innumerable Elizabethan words and peculiarities of diction, which had been instinctively abandoned in the course of the social development of the nation. Chapman in particular, with whose translations of Homer he was well acquainted, suggested to him the use of compound epithets, not only in such perfectly legitimate combinations as (the expression that Keats so much admired) "sea-shouldering whales," but also in monstrosities like "strength-relying boar" (*Iliad*, xiii. 440), "fair young prince first-down chinned" (*Iliad*, xxiv. 306-7). Keats adopted and exaggerated Elizabethan practice in his own narrative poems with such phrases as "oaks, branch-charmèd by the earnest stars," "all her milder-moonèd body's grace," "proud-quivered loins," "sapphire-regioned star," "far-spooming Ocean," etc. etc. Another feature in his diction, which is in large measure derived from his reading of Chapman, is the prolific invention or revival of epithets ending in "y"—"nervy," "ripply," "spangly," and the like—of which practice an admirer and disciple so enthusiastic as Mr. D. G. Rossetti says: "'orby,' 'sphery,' and all such forms, are execrable and disfigure the poem (*Endymion*) throughout." Keats turns, without the least self-restraint, nouns into verbs

(*e.g.* "winging along where the great water *throes*"; "*anguished*," preterite of "to anguish"; "*passioned*," preterite of "to passion");—neuter verbs into active (*e.g.* "nervy tails *cowering* their tawny brushes"); and substantives into participles. For many of these practices, which, when his poems first appeared, excited the wrath of the critics, he could have produced precedents from his favourite Elizabethan authors; but, in his early work, he never seems to have paused to think whether a word was worth reviving in itself, how far it was in harmony with the genius of the spoken language, or even whether it was the best for the purposes of its own context. Nor did he hesitate for a moment to mix with his literary archaisms the vulgar colloquial idioms of the society in which he moved. He obviously had no suspicion of the shock he would communicate to his readers when he made his witch Circe address Glaucus—one of the personages in *Endymion*—as "Sea-flirt!"[1] or when, in the same poem, Venus says to Glaucus:

> Pr'ythee soon,
> *Even in the passing of thine honey-moon,*
> Visit my Cytherea: thou wilt find
> Cupid well-natur'd, my Adonis kind.[2]

Of these vulgar trivialities he never (except in *The Eve of St. Agnes*) quite got rid. In the midst of the diction, at once abstract and emotional, of *Isabella*, we suddenly come across this line:

> *"Good-bye! I'll soon be back."—"Good-bye!" said she*;[3]

and in *Lamia*, a weirdly remote mediæval tale, we find the following passage:

> Let the mad poets say whate'er they please
> Of the sweets of Faeries, Peris, Goddesses,
> There is not *such a treat* among them all,
> Haunters of cavern, lake, and waterfall,
> *As a real woman*, lineal indeed
> From Pyrrha's pebbles or old Adam's seed.[4]

But blots of this kind become rare; and in the *Odes*

[1] *Endymion*, Book iii. 584.
[2] *Ibid*, Book iii. 923-6.
[3] *Isabella*, xxvi.
[4] *Lamia*, Part i.

and in purely pictorial poems, like *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, where his art reaches its climax, we note that he has so refined the peculiarities of diction found in his early work—archaic revival, compound formations, and invented epithets—as to give the glow of emotional life to the images of material objects observed in his own mind. The last stanza of his *Ode to Psyche* may be taken as the "abstract and brief chronicle" of his progress in Poetry:

Yes, I will be thy priest and build a fane
  In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
  Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees
  Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep;
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
  The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep;
And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress
With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
  With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
  Who breeding flowers will never breed the same;
And there shall be for thee all soft delight
  That shadowy thought can win,
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
  To let the warm Love in!

CHAPTER XI

ANTI-ROMANTICISM IN ENGLISH POETRY: GEORGE CRABBE

It would have been surprising had no step been taken in poetry to represent the manners and sentiments of the middle classes, which during the eighteenth century had made so great an advance in wealth and culture. Not only had English Poetry—using the word in its general acceptation—opened, in *The Canterbury Tales*, with an unrivalled picture of the constitution of English society under the mediæval order of things, but the English poetical drama during the Elizabethan era had been the faithful mirror of manners and morals to "the age and body of the time"; while, in the first half of the eighteenth century, the national genius had yielded to an irresistible tendency, which caused the imagination of the people to interest itself mainly in the portraiture of actual life. The poet who, above all others, then represented the spirit of society had made it his boast,

> That not in Fancy's maze he lingered long,
> But stooped to truth and moralised his song.

Pope, however, had employed his genius almost entirely on satirising the corruption of particular individuals in an exclusive oligarchy. The middle class of the people remained unrepresented in poetry no less than in politics; or if any attempt was made to introduce them into verse-composition, they were usually covered with a romantic veil that disguised rather than represented their real character. The time had now come for a poet, inspired with something

of the old Chaucerian humour, to turn the light of Truth on the constitution of English society, and, by exposing its shams and self-deceptions, to earn for himself from the great romantic poet of the period the praise of being "Nature's sternest painter yet her best."

George Crabbe was born on Christmas Eve, 1754. His father, salt-master—*i.e.* collector of the salt-duties—at Aldborough in Suffolk, was a man of vigorous character and some literary taste, who, having once himself been a schoolmaster, was qualified to judge of the advantages of education. Observing in his eldest son a turn for literature, he gave him, as the poet afterwards declared in his letter to Burke, "a better education than his broken fortune would have allowed" at Bungay on the borders of Norfolk, and afterwards at a school in Stowmarket, where he obtained some knowledge of mathematics and classics. Thence he was removed in his fourteenth year to serve as apprentice to a surgeon at Wickhambrook, a village near Bury St. Edmunds. His master, who combined farming with medicine, made use of him in the fields as well as in the dispensary, and his life was one of drudgery till 1771, when he was sent to complete his apprenticeship with Mr. Page, a surgeon at Woodbridge, in whose employment he became acquainted with his future wife, Sarah Elmy, the niece of Tovell, a yeoman in the village of Parham. From his early days he had been accustomed to read and write verse, and, being now in love, he celebrated his mistress in a Lady's Magazine, and obtained a prize offered by the editor for a poem on the subject of Hope. At the same time, as he tells us in his *Tales of the Hall*, he stored his mind with much human experience by listening to the anecdotes told him by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in which he lived. Before leaving Woodbridge he published at Ipswich a poem called *Inebriety*, which shows a careful study of the ethical and satirical manner of Pope. Neither these literary trifles nor the study of botany, for which he showed an early taste, were calculated to advance him in the profession of medicine, which, after a very brief

experience in London, he endeavoured to practise at Aldborough; so that, soon becoming disgusted with surgery, he resolved to try his fortune in literature. Proceeding to London with only five pounds, advanced by Dudley North, he printed in 1780 a poem called *The Candidate*, which he said, in a prefatory address, was "published with a view of obtaining the opinion of the candid and judicious reader on the merits of the writer as a poet: very few being in such cases sufficiently impartial to decide for themselves."

The encouragement he received from the Reviews was not great, and the Journal to Mira which Crabbe kept from April 21 till June 11, 1780, gives a vivid picture of struggles and disappointments in the endeavour to procure literary occupation, all of them faced with the brave spirit of one conscious of merit and resolved to persevere. At last, being at the end of his resources, he addressed a letter to Edmund Burke, in which he described his desperate position and made an admirable and manly appeal to him for help.

"About ten days since," he said, "I was compelled to give a note for seven pounds to avoid an arrest for about double that sum which I owe. I wrote to every friend I had, but my friends are poor likewise; the time of payment approached, and I ventured to represent my case to Lord Rochford. I begged to be credited for this sum till I received it of my subscribers, which I believe will be within one month; but to this letter I had no reply, and I have probably offended by my importunity. Having used every honest means in vain, I yesterday confessed my inability and obtained, with much entreaty, and as the greatest favour, a week's forbearance, when I am positively told I must pay the money or go to prison."

Burke did not hesitate for a moment. He read the verses enclosed for his inspection, sent for the author, and used his influence with the publisher Dodsley to print one of the poems, entitled *The Library*. Dodsley, though he declined to undertake any risk, agreed to do what Burke desired, exerted himself to promote the sale, and generously gave all the profits to the poet. Through Burke, Crabbe

was introduced to many men of influence, among others Sir Joshua Reynolds and Dr. Johnson, the latter of whom was delighted with *The Village*, Crabbe's second poem, which he read and revised, telling the author at the same time that he was not to feel himself under any obligation to adopt his suggested amendments, since the original lines were usually as good as his own. Finding that Crabbe was desirous to take orders, Burke used his influence with the Bishop of Norwich, who, after the poet had been admitted as deacon in London on the 21st of December 1781, ordained him priest in the following August, and licensed him as curate to the Rector of Aldborough. In a few months Burke obtained for him a new appointment as domestic chaplain to the Duke of Rutland, and while at Belvoir Castle his poem *The Village*, published in May 1783, obtained for its author an extensive popularity.

Soon afterwards the Lord Chancellor, Thurlow, gave him the small livings of Frome St. Quintin and Evershot in Dorsetshire, to legalise which appointment he received fiom the Archbishop of Canterbury the degree of LL.B. The Duke of Rutland, having been appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, was obliged to leave Belvoir; but he invited Crabbe to remain in the Castle, and there accordingly, after his marriage with Miss Elmy in December 1783, the poet continued to reside till his appointment as curate in Stathern, a small village in the same neighbourhood. In February 1789 he was allowed by the Lord Chancellor and the Archbishop of Canterbury to exchange his Dorsetshire livings for those of Muston and Allington, the former in Leicestershire, the latter in Lincolnshire. During his residence at Stathern he printed *The Newspaper* in 1785, but from that date, for a period of twenty-two years, the only literary work which he seems to have intended for publication was an Essay on Botany, which, being written in English, he suppressed at the instance of the Vice-Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. He, nevertheless, wrote much in MS., which he allowed his children to destroy in periodical bonfires. In 1792 by the death of Tovell,

his wife's uncle, he became owner of the farm at Parham, and did work as a clergyman in some of the neighbouring villages, but after the death of one of his children, whereby his wife's health was injuriously affected, he removed to Great Glemham Hall, a house belonging to Dudley North, and afterwards to Rendham, in the same neighbourhood, whence he returned in 1807 to Muston, being required by Pretyman, Bishop of Lincoln, to reside in his living.

In September 1807 *The Parish Register* was published, and was followed in 1810 by *The Borough*. *Tales in Verse* appeared in 1812. All these works were received very favourably by the public. Mrs. Crabbe died in the autumn of 1813, and in 1814, having been presented to the living of Trowbridge in Wiltshire, the poet finally left Muston. In his new living the neighbourhood of Bowood and Longleat, and the interest felt in literature by Lord Landsdowne and Lord Bath, drew him gradually into society, where he made the acquaintance of most of the leading writers of the day, including Bowles, Rogers, Moore, Campbell, and Frere, with others who were attracted to the great centre of Whig poetry and politics, Holland House. His *Tales of the Hall* were published in 1819 by John Murray, who gave Crabbe for these and for the remaining copyright of his earlier works £3000. During one of his visits to London in 1822 he met for the first time Sir Walter Scott, who, having been long desirous of his personal friendship, invited him to Scotland, where he stayed for some months at Abbotsford and in Scott's house at Edinburgh. After *Tales of the Hall* Crabbe published no more verse, but he left behind him some "Posthumous Tales." He died on the 3rd of February 1832, and was buried in the parish church at Trowbridge, where a monument is erected to him.

On his reappearance as a poet in the early years of the nineteenth century, Crabbe's genius was judged from opposite points of view by Gifford and Jeffrey, the two most representative critics of the time. Gifford, while praising the dramatic power and intensity of his poems in their individual details, censured Crabbe for his apparently

illustration of the view of life formed by Crabbe after eighteen years' actual experience of parish work in the little village of Muston.

> Hence good and evil mixed, but man has skill
> And power to part them, where he feels the will!
> Toil, care, and patience bless th' abstemious few;
> Fear, shame, and want, the thoughtless herd pursue.

The poetical effect of *The Village* is produced by simple descriptions, so arranged as powerfully to execute the poet's design of painting "the real Picture of the Poor." *The Parish Register* contains not only a similar imitation of external objects, but also sketches of action and character, all tending to illustrate the truth of the conclusion embodied in the lines just cited. A general idea of the curious medley of particulars embraced in the poem may be gained from the Summary of the Contents of Part I.

The village Register considered as containing principally the Annals of the Poor—State of the Peasantry as meliorated by Frugality and Industry—The Cottage of an industrious Peasant; its ornaments—Prints and Books—The Garden; its Satisfactions—The State of the Poor when improvident and vicious—The Row or Street, and its Inhabitants—The Dwellings of one of these—A Public House—Garden and its Appendages—Gamesters; rustic Sharpers, etc.—Conclusion of the Introductory Part.

BAPTISMS

The Child of the Miller's Daughter, and Relation of her Misfortune—A frugal Couple: their kind of frugality—Plea of a Mother of a natural Child: her Churching—Large Family of Gerard Ablett: his apprehensions: Comparison between his State and that of the wealthy Farmer his Master: his Consolation—An old Man's Anxiety for an Heir: the Jealousy of another on having many—Characters of the Grocer Dawkins and his Friend: their different Kinds of Disappointment—Three Infants named—An Orphan Girl and Village Schoolmistress—Gardener's Child: Pedantry and Conceit of the Father: his botanical Discourse: Method of fixing the Embryo-fruit of Cucumbers—Absurd effects of rustic Vanity: observed in the Names of their Children—Relation of the Vestry Debate on a Foundling: Sir Richard Monday—Children of various Inhabitants—The poor Farmer—Children of a Profligate: his Character and Fate—Conclusion.

The sole principle of unity in this poem is the division of the contents of the Register into Baptisms—Marriages—Deaths—classified by the shrewd comments of the Clergyman on each case, as he records the lives and manners of his parishioners in a vein of satiric humour, without any attempt at moralising, and never shrinking from an exhibition of the sordid details that come under his notice, wherever these are illustrative of human character and experience.

The Borough has even less technical unity. It consists of descriptions of character and manners in a sea-side town, presented in a series of twenty-four letters. As to the epistolary form of the poem, which is not explained, we may imagine that it was adopted in answer to some correspondent who, having admired the power and accuracy of observation shown in *The Parish Register*, was anxious to see these qualities applied on the more extended scale required for a picture of urban life. Crabbe describes with the minuteness of a Dutch painter every class of society and action with which he was acquainted at Aldborough. The larger variety of movement and character in the town, as compared with the country, affords the poet fuller opportunities for the exercise of his unrivalled power of realistic portrait-painting; while the keen satiric humour (joined to a true understanding of the essential elements of tragedy and comedy), which shines in *The Parish Register*, gives him, in the narrative episodes of *The Borough*, a power over the emotions more comprehensive than that displayed in the former poem. It was this admirable skill in narration which led Jeffrey in *The Edinburgh Review* to express a "very strong desire to see Mr. Crabbe apply his great powers to the construction of some interesting and connected story"[1]

By these words Jeffrey afterwards explained that he simply meant to ask for "a little more of the deep and tragical passions—of those passions which exalt and overwhelm the soul—to whose stormy seat the modern muses can so rarely raise their flight—and which he has wielded

[1] *Edinburgh Review* for April 1810.

illustration of the view of life formed by Crabbe after eighteen years' actual experience of parish work in the little village of Muston.

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and wine; but even then she bids her servant observe whether the creature is capable of showing any gratitude. Susan hurries off on her errand of relief, and the poem concludes thus:

> This done, the mistress felt disposed to look,
> As self approving, on a pious book;
> Yet to her native bias still inclined,
> She felt her act too merciful and kind;
> But when, long musing on the chilling scene
> So lately past—the frost and sleet so keen—
> The man's whole misery in a single view—
> Yes! she could think some pity was his due.
>
> Thus fix'd, she heard not her attendant glide
> With soft slow steps—till, standing by her side,
> The trembling servant gasp'd for breath, and shed
> Relieving tears, then utter'd, "He is dead!"
>
> "Dead!" said the startled Lady—"Yes, he fell
> Close at the door where he was wont to dwell;
> There his sole friend, the Ass, was standing by,
> Half dead himself, to see his Master die."
>
> "Expired he then, good Heaven! for want of food?"—
> "No! crusts and water in a corner stood.—
> To have this plenty, and to wait so long,
> And to be right too late, is doubly wrong:
> Then every day to see him totter by,
> And to forbear—Oh! what a heart had I!"
>
> "Blame me not, child! I tremble at the news."
> "'Tis my own heart," said Susan, "I accuse.
> To have this money in my purse,—to know
> What grief was his, and what to grief we owe,
> To see him often, always to conceive
> How he must pine and languish, groan and grieve,
> And every day in ease and peace to dine,
> And rest in comfort!—What a heart is mine!"

An almost equally powerful representation of the hardening effects of avarice on the affections is given in "Procrastination," a story told with the same minute realism as "Resentment." It must be allowed that these peculiar excellences of manner often betray Crabbe into the faults which are naturally akin to them. He shows himself insensible to the disgust which the reader feels

room for *The Lord of the Isles*, of which renowned romance I think I have repeated some portions to you. It was older born than Rokeby, though it gave place to it in publishing." The poem, completed with extraordinary rapidity, was published on the 18th of January 1815; the sale was large, but unaccompanied by any of the enthusiasm with which the public had received the first three romances; and Scott subsequently tried to account for the diminished popularity of his later poetical works.[1] The two principal causes he assigns are the number of his own imitators and the appearance of Byron; but, with the natural self-esteem of an author, he passes lightly over the main consideration, namely the instinctive perception of the public that the vein of poetic novelty had been exhausted. His disappointment, however, was much lightened by the consciousness that he had discovered a region of almost unexplored imaginative wealth. *Waverley* had been published anonymously in July 1814, and had met with prodigious success, so that when Ballantyne felt himself obliged to announce to Scott the comparative failure of *The Lord of the Isles*, the latter, says Lockhart, replied "with perfect cheerfulness: 'Well, well, James so be it—but you know we must not droop, for we can't afford to give over. Since one line has failed we must just stick to something else': and so he dismissed me, and resumed his novel."[2]

Throughout the period in which he pursued his scheme of metrical romance Scott never ceased to interest himself in the fortunes of his disciple, Hogg, who, while pushing into the path first opened by his patron, was inclined to think he had himself discovered a more excellent way. Before the appearance of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* he had published a few ballads, which had obtained for him some reputation in the Forest of Ettrick; but in Edinburgh these attracted but little notice. When the third volume of the *Minstrelsy* containing Scott's own ballads was published, "immediately," says Hogg, "I chose a number of traditional facts, and set about

[1] Preface to *Rokeby*, 1830. [2] *Life of Scott*, chap. xxxiv.

national, published under the title of *The Forest Minstrel.* This work seemed obviously to challenge comparison with Burns; and, perhaps in consequence, proved entirely unsuccessful. Scott did what he could for Hogg by recommending his book to the notice of Lady Dalkeith, but in his letter to her he observed with unquestionable justice:

> I fear your ladyship will find but little amusement in it; for the poor fellow has just talent sufficient to spoil him for his own trade, without having enough to support him by literature.[1]

The Countess, in acknowledgment of the dedication to herself, sent Hogg through Scott a hundred guineas, beyond which present *The Forest Minstrel* seems to have brought the author no profit. But in 1813 Hogg added greatly to his reputation by his *Queen's Wake*, which hit the public taste and obtained for him, among other marks of appreciation, the warm praise of Byron. Writing to the latter, Scott says:

> The author of the *Queen's Wake* will be delighted with your approbation. He is a wonderful creature for his opportunities, which were far inferior to those of the generality of Scottish peasants. Burns for instance (not that their extent of talents is to be compared for an instant) had an education not much worse than the sons of many gentlemen in Scotland. But poor Hogg could literally neither read nor write till a very late period of his life, and when he first distinguished himself by his poetical talent could neither spell nor write grammar. When I first knew him, he used to send me his poetry, and was both indignant and horrified when I pointed out to him parallel passages in authors whom he had never read, but whom all the world would have sworn he had copied.[2]

Even this literary success ended in financial failure, and Hogg's agricultural ambition was only realised in 1817, when, through Scott's influence with the Duchess of Buccleuch, the Shepherd, at his own request, was accepted as tenant in the farm of Altrive on the lake of that name in the braes of Yarrow. Scott, who had

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap. xxiii. [2] *Ibid.* chap. xxvi.

exerted himself to get up a subscription for a new *edition de luxe* of the *Queen's Wake*, so as to enable Hogg to stock the farm, says in a letter to Lord Montagu:

There is an old saying of the seamen's, "every man is not born to be a boatswain," and I think I have heard of men born under a sixpenny planet, and doomed never to be worth a groat. I fear something of this vile sixpenny influence had gleamed in at the cottage window when poor Hogg first came squeaking into the world. All that he made by his original book he ventured on a flock of sheep to drive into the Highlands to a farm he had taken there, but of which he could not get possession, so that all the stock was ruined and sold to disadvantage. Then he tried another farm, which proved too dear so that he fairly broke upon it. Then put forth divers publications which had little sale—and brought him accordingly few pence, though some praise. Then came this *Queen's Wake*, by which he might and ought to have made from £100 to £200—for there were, I think, three editions—when lo! his bookseller turned bankrupt, and paid him never a penny.[1]

Scott's fears of the "vile sixpenny influence" were prophetic. Hogg, indeed, having now secured a footing in literature, succeeded in making a good deal of money by his pen: at the same time his vanity and want of tact involved him in many difficulties, of which the publication of the famous "Chaldee Manuscript" in *Blackwood's Magazine* was only a single example He also married a lady of a rank above his own, and received with her a portion of £1000. But these successes elated him over-much, and he was tempted to quit the small farm of Altrive, where he had contrived to support his old parents in moderate comfort, for the larger Mount-Benger, on which he sunk all his capital without getting any return for it. When his nine-years' lease expired, he found himself again penniless, and returned with his wife and children to his Altrive farm, which he was still allowed by the Duke of Buccleuch to hold free of rent It should be added that, in the midst of his misfortunes, he never lost the spirit of buoyant cheerfulness which

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap xxxviii

have somewhere a source deep in nature; and that, before an accurate judgment could be passed on the form of the poet's art, it was necessary to account for the great movement of the public taste.

The success of Scott's metrical romances was in fact due to this, that he was the first to discover a natural poetic form for the expression of mediæval tendencies which, though they had been submerged since the Revolution of 1688 by the inflowing tides of the Renaissance, formed an integral part of the historic life and imagination of the English people. The last volume of this History contained a sketch of the early stages of the Romantic revival in English poetry.[1] I showed that the movement had its fountain-head in a certain reaction of the imagination against the regularity of civil order, and in a desire to restore the liberty and simplicity of an earlier stage of social life. This feeling welled upwards into light through a number of poetical and literary springs. It showed itself first in the revival of lyrical composition by Joseph Warton, Gray, and Collins. The stream thus formed was enlarged by various affluents. Thomas Warton contributed to the change of taste by his commentaries on *The Faery Queene* and Milton's early poems, as well as by his *History of English Poetry*. Bishop Percy popularised the idea of the Ballad by his *Reliques of Early English Poetry*. Macpherson and Chatterton strove to imitate the character of Ossianic sentiment or the idiom of monkish manuscripts. A host of explorers burst into "the silent sea" of Scandinavian mythology. The aim of all these writers was simply to satisfy the craving of the public imagination for novelty; none of them showed any desire to undermine the foundations of social order.

But the progress of events in the last quarter of the eighteenth century inflamed the passions of men; and just as the outbreak of the French Revolution produced a rupture of the Whig party in politics, so did it operate to break up the course of the Romantic movement in the region of imagination. One section of writers, as we have

[1] Vol. V. chap. xii.

seen, allied themselves with the Revolution on its intellectual side, and adopted its ideas of sentiment and morality. Their chief aim was the emancipation of thought and taste from all traditional restrictions. In a crude and vulgar form the romantic tendency had already been foreshadowed by the revived Petrarchism of the Della Cruscan school of poetry, but it found a larger channel of expression in the fictions of the numerous men of letters who fell under the influence of Rousseau, and followed the lead of William Godwin in his speculations on Political Justice.

In the imagination of society at large, however, the influence of the French Revolution was chiefly manifested by the impulse it gave to ideas of action and adventure. If the source of inspiration for the philosophers of the Romantic school was French, Germany provided new materials for the dramatist and the lyrical poet. A certain amount of popularity was obtained on the stage by plays constructed after the fashion of Schiller's *Robbers* and Kotzebue's *Stranger*; but the poems which fell in most congenially with the new conditions of English taste were the wild ballads of Bürger. Matthew Lewis was the first to introduce his countrymen to the new legendary school of German lyrical composition, which seems itself to have been set in motion by the fame of Bishop Percy's *Reliques*; and imagination having been once infected with a taste for spectres, demons, and other mediæval superstitions, the German epidemic soon became universal. As Scott's example shows, the new impulse was felt by men whose conservative instincts in all matters of Church and State were deeply rooted, and whose taste was grounded on long study of the English classical style inaugurated by the Revolution of 1688: the author of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* made his first modest appearance before the public as a translator of German ballads and a contributor to Lewis' *Tales of Wonder*.

But the invention of Scott was far too large and representative to restrict itself for long to so limited a sphere. In his temperament were happily blended all the

itself. Scott had assumed the spontaneous air of the ancient bard; but in reality he showed himself the brilliant successor of polished *trouvères*, Chaucer, Boccaccio, Ariosto; and however he might enliven his narrative manner with simplicities of diction borrowed from the ballad, he knew well that the artificial revival of the long-decayed oral minstrelsy would fail in its effect so soon as it ceased to be a novelty. In *Rokeby* he applied his sophisticated style to an uncongenial subject, and the public, without understanding the cause, instinctively felt that the poetical propriety of the new minstrelsy had vanished. The poet, himself with a judicious respect for the unconscious judgments of his readers, began to examine critically the foundations of his own metrical manner. He asked himself whether there was any fundamental reason why he should not apply to romantic composition in prose the principles which had proved so popular in verse; perceiving that if this way were open to him, he would be in possession of an almost unlimited supply of subjects in place of the mine which he felt to be nearly exhausted. His meditations encouraged him to resume the narrative of *Waverley*, which he had laid aside during the inspired period of his "Minstrelsy"; and the delight with which that romance was hailed by the public, compared with the comparatively cold reception of *The Lord of the Isles*, confirmed him in his determination henceforth to exchange the methods of the poet for those of the novelist.

Had Scott's own sound judgment not discovered to him the artificiality of life in the revived "Minstrelsy," he might have learned the lesson from the literary experience of his disciple, James Hogg. The Ettrick Shepherd was a poet of extraordinary gifts. That a man who at the age of eighteen could barely read, and could not write, should within a few years have acquired such a mastery over the art of versification as to produce the admirable war-song *Donald M'Donald*, is even in itself a less remarkable fact than that the same man should soon afterwards have felt himself capable of editing a weekly newspaper, and have persuaded men of sense and talent to co-operate

with him in his adventure. Nature had endowed him with a fine and graceful fancy, and with abundance of comic humour, but not with critical judgment, and fortune had deprived him of the education required to turn his genius towards noble objects. Possessing in exceptional measure the faculty of poetic imitation, he had produced, in his pastoral solitude, an abundance of verse, which was mainly an echo of what he had read; and he was intoxicated with the praises with which his compositions were received by a rustic audience. When Scott produced his imitations of Border Minstrelsy, Hogg, perceiving that their manner was not genuinely antique, showed that he could himself construct with great facility ballads bearing superficially a closer resemblance to the style of the Border singers. The praise that Scott, with his usual generosity, bestowed upon compositions like *Gilmanscleuch* encouraged Hogg to publish his collection of tales, entitled *The Mountain Bard;* and the considerable popularity which this volume obtained inspired him with the ambition to make a second venture on the public favour in *The Forest Minstrel.* Clever as were his imitations of Burns's songs in the Scottish vernacular, they showed none of the original power of thought that distinguished the author of *Tam o' Shanter* and *The Twa Dogs*, and consequently excited no popular enthusiasm.

Returning to the paths of minstrelsy, Hogg published in 1813 *The Queen's Wake*, the work on which his reputation chiefly depends, and which, appearing while the taste for metrical romance still prevailed, was warmly received by the Edinburgh public. Like *The Mountain Bard*, the volume was composed of a number of separate tales, already written by Hogg, but a character of unity was given to it by the setting which, in obvious imitation of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, made it appear that these tales were monuments of a competition of ancient Bards who sang before Mary Queen of Scots on her first landing in her kingdom. The Shepherd introduces a Bard, representing himself, as one of the candidates, whose romance, though it does not succeed in gaining the first

CHAPTER XIII

THE ROMANCE OF HISTORY

WALTER SCOTT: THE WAVERLEY NOVELS

THE years 1814-1824 were the most brilliant and prosperous in Scott's literary career. They opened with the publication of *Waverley*. As to the success of that novel it is well to cite Lockhart's remarks:

In returning to *Waverley*, I must observe most distinctly that nothing can be more unfounded than the statement which has of late years been frequently repeated in memoirs of Scott's life, that the sale of the first edition of this immortal Tale was slow. It appeared on the 7th of July, and the whole impression (1000 copies) had disappeared within five weeks; an occurrence then unprecedented in the case of an anonymous novel, put forth at what is called among publishers "the dead season." A second edition of 2000 copies was at least projected by the 24th of the same month; that appeared before the end of August, and it too had gone off so rapidly, that when passing through Edinburgh, on his way from the Hebrides, he found Constable eager to treat, on the same terms as before, for a third of 1000 copies. This third edition was published in October, and when a fourth of the like extent was called for in November, I find Scott writing to John Ballantyne: "I suppose Constable won't quarrel with a work on which he has netted £612 in four months, with a certainty of making it £1000 before the year is out"; and in fact, owing to the diminished expense of advertising, the profits of this fourth edition were to each party £440. To avoid recurring to these details, I may as well state at once, that a fifth edition of 1000 copies appeared in January 1815; a sixth of 1500 in June 1816; a seventh of 2000 in October 1817, and an eighth of 2000 in April 1821; that in the collective editions, prior to 1829, 11,000 were disposed of; and that the sale of the current edition with notes, begun in 1829, has already reached 40,000 copies. Well might Constable regret that he

had not ventured to offer £1000 for the whole copyright of *Waverley*.[1]

The rest of the Waverley series of novels, published up to the catastrophe of 1826, most of which met with nearly as much financial success as the first, some with even more, appeared in the following order:

1815.—*Guy Mannering*
1816.—*The Antiquary*
Tales of My Landlord (First Series) { *Black Dwarf*, *Old Mortality*
1817.—*Rob Roy*
1818.—*Tales of My Landlord* (Second Series) } *Heart of Midlothian*
1819.—*Tales of My Landlord* (Third Series) { *Bride of Lammermoor*, *Legend of Montrose*
Ivanhoe
1820.—*The Monastery*
The Abbot
1821.—*Kenilworth*
The Pirate
1822.—*The Fortunes of Nigel*
1823.—*Peveril of the Peak*
Quentin Durward
St Ronan's Well
1824.—*Redgauntlet*
1825.—*Tales of the Crusaders* { *Talisman*, *The Betrothed*

In 1815 Scott was presented to the Prince Regent, and made the personal acquaintance of Byron. A little later in the year he went to the Continent to visit the field of Waterloo, and after his return to Abbotsford published his poem of that name. He also wrote *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, which were published at the beginning of 1816. *Harold the Dauntless*, begun in 1815, did not appear till January 1817, about which time Scott planned and wrote a play called *The Doom of Devorgoil*; this, however, was never acted. In 1818 he accepted the offer of a baronetcy, and sold all his existing copyrights to Constable for £12,000; the money being required to meet the expenses he had incurred in the

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap xxxii.

At Christmas 1827 he met his creditors.

"A dividend of six per cent," says Lockhart, "was paid on their whole claims. The result of their high-hearted debtor's exertions between January 1826 and January 1828 was in all very nearly £40,000. No literary biographer, in all likelihood, will ever have such another fact to record. The creditors unanimously passed a vote of thanks for the indefatigable industry which had achieved so much for their behoof." [1]

The works by which Scott accomplished this astonishing feat were *Woodstock*, published in June 1826; *The Life of Buonaparte*, published in June 1827; *Chronicles of the Canongate* (First Series), November 1827; and *Tales of a Grandfather* (First Series), December 1827. Following these came *The Fair Maid of Perth* and *Tales of a Grandfather* (Second Series), 1828; *Anne of Geierstein*, *History of Scotland*, vol. i. for *Lardner's Cyclopædia*, and *Tales of a Grandfather* (Third Series), 1829; *Letters on Demonology*, *Tales of a Grandfather* (Final Series), *History of Scotland*, vol. ii. 1830. As the result of these gigantic exertions, the amount of the Ballantynes' debt was again largely reduced.

"The meeting of trustees and creditors," says Lockhart, "took place on the 17th [December 1830]. Mr. George Forbes (brother to the late Sir William) in the chair. There was then announced another dividend on the Ballantyne estate of three shillings in the pound—thus reducing the original amount of the debt to about £54,000. . . . The meeting was numerous—and, not contented with a renewed vote of thanks to their debtor, they passed unanimously the following resolution, which was moved by Mr. (now Sir James) Gibson-Craig, and seconded by the late Mr. Thomas Allan—both, by the way, leading Whigs:—'That Sir Walter Scott be requested to accept of his furniture, plate, linen, paintings, library, and curiosities of every description, as the best means the creditors have of expressing their very high sense of his most honourable conduct, and in grateful acknowledgment for the unparalleled and most successful exertions he has made, and continues to make, for them.'" [2]

Scott had dreamed of clearing off the whole debt in two years more. But this was not to be. To save his

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, chap. lxxiv.
[2] *Ibid.* chap. lxxix.

honour he had sacrificed his life. In February 1830 he had a paralytic seizure, followed in November by a fit of apoplexy, and in April 1831 by another of apoplectic paralysis. Nevertheless in May 1831 he resumed, and endeavoured to recast, his romance *Count Robert of Paris*, which he had begun in 1830; he made also a beginning of *Castle Dangerous*, both stories being published together in November 1831. Though scarcely able to move, he embarked on board the frigate *Barham* in October 1831, and was taken for a cruise to Malta, where he stayed till December, and then visited Naples. Thence, in April 1832, he moved to Rome, which he left in May, passing through Florence, Venice, Munich, Ulm, Heidelberg, to Frankfort, and from that city down the Rhine to Nimeguen, where he was once more attacked by apoplexy. Conveyed to London, which he reached on the 13th of June, he was carried thence to Abbotsford, where he lingered till the 21st of September, when he died, and was buried at the Abbey of Dryburgh, "in the sepulchre of his ancestors," on the 26th of the same month.

If Aristotle was right in classifying as poetry the Mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus,[1] though written in prose, a History of English Poetry can hardly exclude a consideration of the growth of Romantic Fiction. From very early times two separate and opposing types have been employed by the professors of the art of story-telling—the novel and the romance. Both of these aim at imitating social action, character, and sentiment, but the conceptions of nature and society that they severally embody are so antagonistic as to suggest what is actually the case—that they are the offspring of minds belonging to different races, different ranks of society, and different stages of civilisation. The novel (*novella*) imitates the actions and characters of real life and contemporary experience, the persons who figure in it generally belong to the middle classes of the community; the tone of its sentiment is often satirical and even cynical The romance (*roman*, in the

[1] Aristotle, *Poetics*, i. 6-7

contrary, carries the imagination into some past, possibly quite ideal, age; the actors in it are of lofty station, and the sentiments to which they give expression have a chivalrous, even a poetic cast. The explanation of this violent contrast of character is, that one mode of fiction represents the Roman and the other the German strain in the Empire of Charlemagne and in the modern imagination.

The novel, of which the tales in the *Decameron* may be regarded as the earliest type, and which is plainly a development of the more ancient *fabliau*, has its root in the civic life of antiquity, and reflects the spirit of the municipal institutions of the Roman Empire which, surviving the barbarian invasion, were preserved by Charlemagne in his capacity of Emperor of the West. But the romance, as we find it exemplified in the stories of the Knights of Charlemagne and Arthur, as well as in the tales of later date, embodies the spirit of chivalry, originating in the feudal system, and employed by the founder of the Holy Roman Empire as an instrument for maintaining order in the distant dominions subdued by the arms of his Frankish followers.

The lines of the divergent traditions thus started are continued in all subsequent ages, and the primary characteristics of the novel or the romance are found to prevail, according as the Roman genius of the Renaissance or the Teutonic genius of Feudalism obtains the upper hand in the administration of European affairs. Thus during the whole period of the Crusades, while the ecclesiastical and feudal régime, developed in the Holy Roman Empire, was in its fullest vigour, romance dominated the sphere of fiction. Now romance, as its name indicates, in the beginning, simply meant *history* in the romance tongue, as distinguished from history in Latin. In an early chapter of this work I endeavoured to trace the various stages of the development of mediaeval Romance.[1] Beginning with the metrical songs of the Minstrels in the *Chansons de Geste*, I showed how in time the historic element in these was gradually overlaid by the

[1] Vol. i. pp. 437-45

fictitious arts of the professional story-teller. The *trouvères* introduced into their tales love-plots, the models of which they found in the Greek novels of the later Empire; but they were careful to join to these a representation of manners and sentiments proper to the Catholic religion and the still universal system of Teutonic chivalry. The romance of *Tristan*, for example, as composed by Chrestien de Troyes, was a faithful mirror of knightly ethics according to the standard recognised in the days of the Crusades. In order to make the narrative more life-like and interesting, these legendary tales of the Knights of Arthur and Charlemagne were soon reduced to prose, and combined with such conceptions of History as are embodied in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The various editors of Malory's History of King Arthur, as late as 1634, regard the story of the King as faithfully historical, and up to the reign of Henry VII. it was venerated as a repository of chivalrous ethics. Caxton, for example, says, in his Prologue to the History (1485):

Then al these things forsayd aledged, I coude not wel denye but that there was suche a noble Kyng named Arthur, and reputed one of the IX worthy, and fyrst and chyef of the cristen men, and many noble volumes be made of hym and of his noble knyghtes in Frensshe, which I have seene and redde beyonde the see, which been not had in our maternal tongue, but in Walsshe ben many, and also in Frensshe, and somme in Englysshe, but no where nygh alle. Wherfore suche as have late ben drawen oute bryefly into Englysshe, I have, after the symple connyng that God hathe sente to me, under the favour and correctyon of al noble lordes and gentylmen, enprysed to enprynte a book of the noble hystoryes of the said Kynge Arthur, and of certeyn of his knyghtes, after a copye unto me delyvered, whyche copye Syr Thomas Malorye dyd take oute of certeyn bookes of Frennshe, and reduced it into Englysshe And I, accordying to my copy, have doone sette it in enprynte, to the entente that noblemen may see and lerne the noble acts of chyvalrye, the jentyl and vertuous dedes, that some knyghtes, used in tho dayes by whyche they came to honoure, and how they that were vycious were punysshed and often put to shame and rebuke, humbly byseching al noble lordes and ladyes, wyth

al other estates, of what estate or degree they been of, that shal see and rede in this sayd book and werke, that they take the good and honest actes in their remembrance, and to folowe the same.

The History of King Arthur might indeed have served as a standard of manners and morals for Catholic Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But as, on the one hand, the life of chivalry decayed, in the midst of local anarchy, and, on the other, the necessity of strengthening the authority of the Crown in each independent nation became more apparent, the fictitious representation of society in the old romances lost its verisimilitude. A new class of romantic "history" came into fashion, the heroes of which were the offspring of abstract fancy, and were placed by their creators in imaginary situations constructed solely with a view to gratify the public craving for marvel and mystery. Such was the essential character of the numerous romances which strove emulously with each other to outdo the extravagances first popularised by *Amadis of Gaul*, until the *coup de grâce* was finally given to them by Cervantes.

When the mediaeval arrangements of European society gradually gave place to the Monarchical order established in the different independent nations, the decline in the historic principles of romance was accompanied by a revival of the realistic manner peculiar to the novel. This was naturally encouraged by the sovereigns of each country, whose interests were opposed to the feudal privileges of their noble vassals, and it harmonised no less with the spirit of the Classical Renaissance, which was beginning everywhere to exert its civil influence against the ecclesiastical and feudal traditions inherited from the universal Empire of Charlemagne. It is moreover observable that, whenever the Renaissance makes its entry into one of the western kingdoms of Europe, a conflict follows between the tastes encouraged by it and those which are nourished on the old chivalrous tradition, and that the advocates of the latter are usually to be found in the ranks of the old aristocracy and

gentry; whereas classical innovations and fictions imitating actual life are mainly promoted by Court circles. Thus in Spain the ideas of poor Don Quixote were evidently shared by a large class of country gentlemen, whose love for the romances of the Amadis class was equalled by their disdain of the "picaresque" novels favoured in the cities and at Court. So again, in France, the passion for romance is illustrated in D'Urfé's *Astrée* and La Calprenède's *Cassandra*, the favourite reading of the aristocracy; while, at a later date, the Hôtel Rambouillet became the centre equally of the Frondist intrigues of the feudal nobility and of the romantic conceits of the Scudérys; a taste which the Court, aided by what may be called the literary *Tiers État*, encountered with the realism of the *fabliau*, variously embodied in the tales of La Fontaine, the dramatic satires of Molière, and (somewhat later) the "picaresque" adventures of Gil Blas.

In England, where the struggle between the civil and feudal elements in the institutions of the Middle Ages was longer and more equally sustained than on the Continent, the progress of Romance kept pace with the political development of the people. During the semi-absolutism of Elizabeth's reign a love for the splendid ceremonials of knighthood survived, and the ideals of chivalry were expounded in the *Arcadia* of Sir Philip Sidney and in Spenser's *Faery Queene*. The literature of the first half of the seventeenth century showed, on the other hand, the advance of the Republican and Classical spirit of the Renaissance. But, during the temporary Monarchical reaction of the Restoration era, the spirit of feudalism once more found a dim mirror in the taste for the feeble imitations of French romances produced by the Earl of Orrery and Mrs. Aphra Behn.

By the triumph of the Constitutional movement in the Revolution of 1688, a compromise was effected in the sphere of fiction as in the region of politics, but though the struggle between the Classic and Romantic parties was transformed in appearance, it was continued in principle. If ideal knights and legendary heroes

vanished from the pages of fiction, they were replaced, by Richardson and his female disciples, with the figures of faultless modern noblemen and gentlemen, like Sir Charles Grandison or Lord Orville. In direct opposition to the romantic practice, Fielding, in *Tom Jones*, embodied the realistic spirit of the Renaissance; while Smollett, following in the footsteps of Le Sage, adapted the principle of the old *fabliau* to modern circumstances. A third species of novel, half-classic, half-romantic, was invented by Sterne, who, in *Tristram Shandy*, turned the light of humorous and sentimental reflection on the eccentricities of character and the pedantries of scholasticism bequeathed to modern society from the Middle Ages.

The first English pioneer of modern romantic prose fiction was free from all suspicion of Sentimentalism. As I have already shown, the moving spring of Horace Walpole's aesthetic experiments was Ennui:[1] his taste was of that aristocratic type which, weary of political intrigue, and sated with the conventions of fashion, sought to obtain relief from its own self-consciousness in the pursuit of artistic curiosities. The Gothic principle of liberty, in opposition to the classic principle of order, attracted him because, from its long suppression, it had an air of novelty, and he applied it in a dilettante spirit alike to architecture and fiction. When he first published *The Castle of Otranto*, he pretended that the book was a translation of an old Italian romance, probably written about the beginning of the sixteenth century, with a view "to confirm the populace in their ancient errors and superstitions."

"This solution of the author's motives is, however," he continues, "offered as a mere conjecture. Whatever his views were, or whatever effects the execution of them might have, this work can only be laid before the public at present as a matter of entertainment. Even as such, some apology for it is necessary. Miracles, visions, necromances, dreams, and other preternatural events, are exploded now even from romances. That was

[1] Vol. v. p. 361.

not the case when our author wrote; much less when the story itself is supposed to have happened. Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark ages, that an author would not be faithful to the manner of the times who should omit all mention of them. He is not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them."[1]

There is much resemblance in this to Tasso's apology for introducing into his *Jerusalem* the element of magic;[2] the difference being that Walpole's excuses were made to the rationalism of English readers in the eighteenth century, and Tasso's to the Inquisition of the sixteenth. Scott, with a generous enthusiasm for a writer whom he regarded as his progenitor in fiction, tries to credit Walpole with motives higher than the latter himself professed. "It was his object," says he, "to draw such a picture of domestic life and manners, during the feudal times, as might actually have existed." It is true that in the Preface to the second edition of his romance, after confessing to the deception he had practised in pretending the tale to be ancient, Walpole says:

> The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds [of romance, the ancient and the modern] Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he wished to conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; to make them think, speak, and act as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions.

But in truth "the rules of probability" are no more observed in the character-drawing of *The Castle of Otranto* than in its supernatural action. The crude and childish "situations," brought about by the incredible incidents recorded, prevent the representation of anything like nature in the conduct of the *dramatis personae*, and if the talk of the servants, on which the author piques himself, be like life, this natural effect counts for nothing in the impossible texture of the whole story. Walpole, appealed—as he admitted in his first edition—to the

[1] Walpole's preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto*
[2] See vol. III. pp. 114 15, and vol. V pp 7-8

THE END